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ABSTRACT

This paper is designed to help education and training providers in the United Kingdom understand what accreditation options are available and choose solutions that match their particular needs. It aims to help them appreciate the importance of accreditation to adult learners, understand some terminology, know what choices there are in offering accreditation, understand the ways different accreditation systems work, and use the support and experience of the awarding bodies to enhance opportunities for adult learners. Section 1 explains the reasons for providing accreditation and assessment that support and enhance learning, access, and progression. Section 2 describes the principles and processes of accreditation and clarifies some terminology used in accreditation and the differences between the various bodies that use the terms. Section 3 explains how some of the more widely used accreditation systems work and the ways in which they apply the terminology to their own procedures. Section 4 summarizes the main characteristics of each accreditation system. Section 5 provides a checklist for managers and practitioners of factors to consider when choosing accreditation or reviewing existing arrangements. Section 6 identifies issues that specifically affect adult learners and areas where further clarification and development work is needed. Section 6 also provides a subject index and a list of the full names and addresses of the awarding bodies involved in the systems described in section 3. (YLB)

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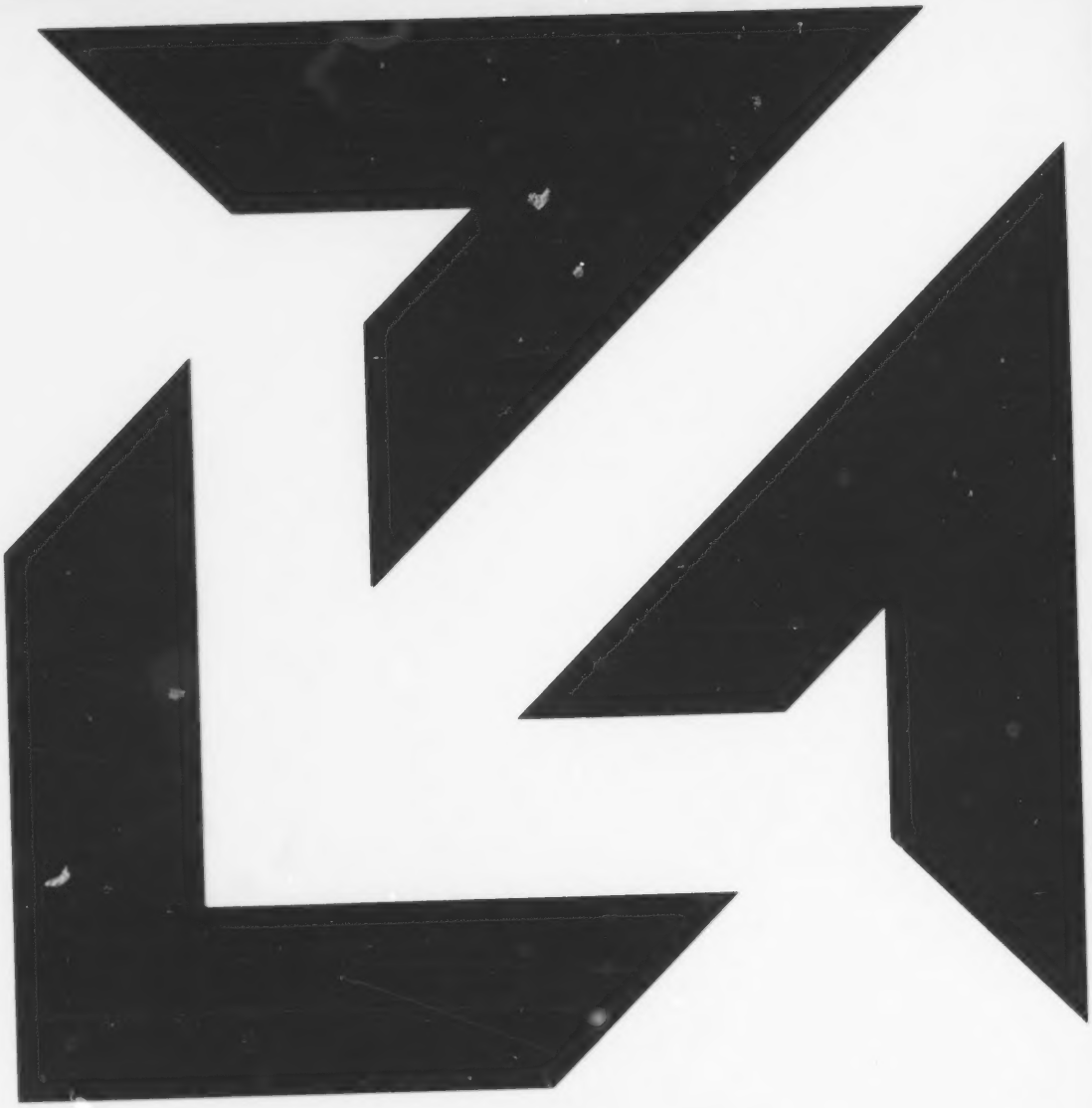

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Preface

There is widespread agreement about the need to improve the qualifications of the British population, and to encourage everyone to continue learning throughout their lives. To achieve this, people need to be able to have their learning recognised, through certificates and qualifications, wherever and whenever the learning has taken place. However, the ways in which formal recognition of achievement is carried out by a range of agencies and organisations, at local and national level, vary enormously and the terms which are used to describe the processes can be very confusing to individual learners, employers and others. Sometimes the same word is used by different bodies to mean quite distinct things, while in other cases different words are used for the same process.

This paper aims to disentangle some of the confusion, to explain the processes, and to show how the best-known accreditation systems use and apply the words to their own procedures.

Accreditation systems and processes are also being affected by developments like the introduction of core skills into qualifications, and proposals for a national credit accumulation and transfer framework. Some of these are touched on at the end of the paper.

In general, we have chosen to use the word 'accreditation' in this paper to describe the whole set of interlocking processes which organisations use to recognise learning achievement. Where particular bodies use the term in a narrower sense, we have explained this.

This paper is being published at a time of rapid change in the forms of accreditation being offered to adult learners, and when at least one major accrediting body, the Council for National Academic Awards, is about to transfer its powers to individual universities and the new Higher Education Quality Council. We are confident that the text is as complete and accurate as it is possible to be at a time of such turmoil, and we have checked the detail with the relevant organisations. However, we apologise for any inadvertent inaccuracies.

The report was produced by the Unit for the Development of Adult Continuing Education (UDACE), in close consultation with the various bodies whose work is discussed. In April 1992, as a result of a Government decision, UDACE was merged into the Further Education Unit, which is distributing the final product.

Stephen McNair

August 1992

Understanding Accreditation: ways of recognising achievement

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Introduction

Many agencies are trying to make accreditation more flexible, reflecting a general move to make education and training programmes more responsive to learners' needs. This is part of a concern to:

- **make the content and ways of delivering learning more flexible;**
- **be clearer about the requirements for a qualification** by defining learning outcomes and linking them to assessment processes;
- **promote assessment methods that recognise achievement and support learning** and help learners recognise what it is they can do, and what they can use the learning for;
- **make progression routes clearer** so that learners can plan their learning and move easily between agencies and programmes.

Accreditation of learning and achievement is very important to adult learners for reasons which are explored briefly in Section 1. However, many organisations and agencies offer accreditation and considerable confusion is caused by different uses of terminology, different procedures and the diverse range of functions carried out by these organisations.

A number of accreditation systems exist. Each offers a different type of accreditation and each has evolved in response to the needs of particular groups of learners, providers, employers and academic/vocational programmes. Well-known systems include those operated by:

- Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC);
- City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G);
- Open College Networks (OCNs);
- RSA Examinations Board (RSA);
- Access Courses Recognition Group (ACRG);
- Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA);
- individual universities.

Each of these organisations has a range of responsibilities and functions, and the procedures each of them use are explained in this paper. The role of the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) and its relationship to other organisations who offer accreditation are also explained.

Structure

This paper is designed to help education and training providers to understand what accreditation options are available, and choose solutions which match their particular needs. It aims to help providers of education and training to:

- appreciate the importance of accreditation to adult learners;
- understand some of the terminology;
- know what choices there are in offering accreditation;
- understand the ways different accreditation systems work;
- use the support and experience of the awarding bodies to enhance opportunities for adult learners.

The paper is divided into six sections:

1 Accreditation and adult learners

explains the reasons for providing accreditation and assessment which support and enhance learning, access and progression.

2 Terminology

describes the principles and processes of accreditation and clarifies some of the terminology used in accreditation and the differences between the various bodies which use the terms.

3 Examples of accreditation systems

explains how some of the more widely used accreditation systems work and the ways in which they apply the terminology to their own procedures.

4 Accreditation systems — key features

summarises the main characteristics of each system.

5 Choosing the right accreditation system

provides a checklist for managers and practitioners, of factors to consider when choosing accreditation or reviewing existing arrangements.

6 Issues and implications

identifies issues that specifically affect adult learners and areas where further clarification and development work is needed.

Audience

The paper is intended for staff and managers who are reviewing the forms of accreditation offered by their organisations or considering offering accreditation where it has not previously been given. It is therefore aimed at:

- adult education tutors, principals and advisers;
- further education managers wishing to expand or review their adult and continuing education provision;
- providers of employee development programmes;
- guidance workers and careers officers;
- staff of Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs);
- Credit accumulation and transfer scheme (CATS) co-ordinators and staff running modular schemes in higher education (HE).

Section 1

Accreditation and Adult Learners

Making learning more accessible

Accreditation provides a means of placing a recognisable value on learning. For adults, learning may be of many kinds, based in a wide variety of settings and accreditation needs to take account of a broad range of life and work experience. Accreditation of non-formal learning can be a powerful motive for adults to seek progression into other, more formal accreditation systems.

If adults are to have access to qualifications and the formal recognition of achievement, they have to be able to relate their qualifications, prior experience and circumstances to routes for formal progression in education and training. Promoting access therefore involves finding ways to harmonise informal learning with the requirements of accreditation, which measures individuals against external criteria. This can be difficult because of the wide variety of accreditation systems, each with a different history, tradition and perception of its particular role in the accreditation market.

Making progression easier

There are currently two national systems — the National Open College Network and the CNAA Credit and Accumulation Transfer Scheme (CATS)[1] — which use the term 'credit' to describe components which can be accumulated to form an award and transferred between programmes or institutions. Other accreditation systems also allow the flexible accumulation of components or units without necessarily describing them as credits.

When an individual moves from one system to another, there can be problems over whether credits are recognised by other accreditation schemes because the levels, values and specification of credits are all different. This is a particular problem for adults because they tend to move between systems and can accumulate credits over a number of years. Recognising different forms of accreditation therefore usually involves individual negotiation and the support of guidance and admissions staff. This is time-consuming. A wider and more systematic approach to the definition and awarding of credit would remove the need for individual negotiation. Different credits could be transferred from one

1 The CNAA will be abolished under the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, but some of its functions will be transferred to the Higher Education Quality Council and other bodies.

system to another and more routes towards a much wider range of qualifications could be opened up.

A flexible credit accumulation and transfer framework based on an agreed definition of 'credit' could allow different systems to operate within it and ensure that collections of different credits are appropriate for individual learners' needs. Creating education and training provision around a comprehensible framework for accrediting the learning of adults is vital if they are to be able to progress through different sectors in post-16 education and training, and a number of agencies are currently working towards the creation of such a framework.

Making learning more flexible

The traditional approach in formal education and training has been to offer courses where a specific package of learning is delivered over a set period of time. Awarding bodies may specify duration and how content and assessment should be organised. Non-formal and continuing education (for example, much traditional adult education provision or on-the-job staff training) is also often delivered through courses which do not lead to accreditation.

When accreditation is based on a precise definition of 'credits' it becomes possible to offer a menu of packages, modules or units, each of which has a credit value attached to it. Credits can be achieved by successful completion of the units and can be accumulated towards a range of awards at different levels. Units can thus be acquired when it suits the learner, and accumulated over a more flexible time period than is permitted by a traditional course. In this way, accreditation based on the awarding of credits or the flexible accumulation of components of a qualification encourages more convenient and flexible approaches to learning, including part-time, open and distance learning.

Credit-based systems enable credit to be awarded for learning in employment and for employers to seek accreditation for experiential learning or specific job-related training. A wide range of ways in which learning can be recognised and transferred becomes possible if this approach is adopted.

If a range of units is on offer, learners can assemble these in combinations that meet their particular needs.

Making assessment part of learning

Many existing forms of accreditation do not lead to the kind of assessment which helps adults recognise all their achievements, articulate them and use them to make informed choices about next steps. However, when accreditation is based on the clear definition of a broad range of learning outcomes with assessment methods which are supportive, flexible and understood by the learner, it can do precisely that.

It is easier to assess and accredit prior learning if content and a broad range of learning outcomes are already defined to help the learner provide the evidence that s/he has met the required standard. Accreditation systems which are able to recognise learning from different cultural and linguistic settings make access to assessment and

accreditation easier. A combination of methods, experience and settings can be used to demonstrate the achievement of learning outcomes that have been specified in a learning agreement between the provider and learner.

Making qualifications clearer

The clear and explicit definition of all the possible outcomes of learning and the presentation of learning programmes as a series of assessed units or modules, rather than as a traditional course make it much easier to accredit previous learning and achievement.

In credit-based systems, the description of what the credit is being awarded for can be clearly defined. When this is made public, it enables more informed choice on the part of learners and customers (such as employers) who may wish to buy or provide packages of learning to meet particular needs. The specification and awarding of credit enable on-the-job training to be accredited more easily.

Section 2

Terminology

The words used to describe accreditation in different areas of education and training can be very confusing. Different organisations use terms like accreditation, certification and validation in different ways.

The word accreditation can be used, as in this paper, to describe a series of processes formally recognising and awarding credit for learning. However, it is also used interchangeably with terms that describe some of the components of the overall process of accreditation; it can also be used in a specific, technical sense. This section offers concise definitions of key terms, with a short commentary on each.

Since this is not intended as a textbook of educational theory, the definitions have been kept as concise and simple as possible, and grouped under four headings:

- **Principles of accreditation**
- **Processes of accreditation**
- **Awarding bodies**
- **Programme design**

Principles of accreditation

Accreditation

Accreditation is a process of formally recognising and awarding credit for learning achievement.

Accreditation involves judgements about the value of learning; this may be expressed as a grade, or a record of credits achieved. Traditionally, this has been done by scrutinising the content, delivery, methods of assessment and the intended outcomes of learning and then attributing a value to the learning through an award or qualification. Accreditation is offered by a range of organisations such as a national awarding body (for example BTEC and C&G), an examining board (such as the Joint Matriculation Board), an HE institution, a professional body, or an OCN. The various processes involved in accreditation can be carried out in formal, institutional frameworks (such as a further education (FE) college, or a HE institution), but accreditation is increasingly available in work-based training, adult education services, private training organisations and companies.

Terms related to recognising and attaching a value to learning are:

Credit

Accreditation involves a notion of value which may be implicit or explicit; in credit-based systems this is made clear to the learner and quantified through the awarding of credits but confusion is created because the term credit is either used generically — 'giving recognition (or credit) for learning' or specifically within a particular system to quantify learning. Credit is also sometimes used to describe a grade of achievement e.g. pass/credit/distinction.

In systems based on a precise definition of credit, it is a unit of value which may be attached to a number of outcomes of learning. Some accreditation systems attach a credit value to the actual or notional amount of time taken to achieve learning outcomes. Other credits may be solely outcome-based regardless of time taken to gain them. In systems without a precise definition of outcomes, credit usually refers to a unit of delivery in the form of a module or other package of learning.

Credits are therefore derived in different ways. The CNAA CATS derives credits by dividing up a full-time degree. A CNAA credit is 1/360 of an honours degree. The OCNs, on the other hand, base the award of credits on outcomes achievable in 30 hours of notional learning time. The term credit is used differently in National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ): the awarding of an NVQ unit is based on the achievement of specified occupational outcomes regardless of the time taken or where the learning took place.

In all accreditation systems, small, manageable components enable people to build their own structures of credit accumulation; the degree of flexibility, however, varies considerably.

The term training credits describes a quite separate scheme under which the Government allocates an amount of money to an individual (through the TECs) so that they can purchase vocational training. Here credit refers to a sum of money, not a measure of learning achievement.

Credit accumulation

Many awards and qualifications are designed so that once separate components are achieved and accredited, they can be accumulated over time for a learner to obtain a whole award. In credit-based systems, these components can be accumulated as specific credits.

Credit accumulation and transfer

In some accreditation systems, credits gained from a qualification, part qualification and other learning experiences may be recognised as meeting some or all of the requirements of another award. Learners can then transfer or cash in their credits and progress towards a different award from the original one, or an award in a different institution without having to repeat assessments and learning.

Level

In addition to different notions of value, there are a number of ways of attributing a level to credits and qualifications. Ideas about whether a credit is at a higher or lower level may be based on:

- the amount of supervision required to perform an occupational role — progression from following routine instructions to self-directed professional activity;
- increasing autonomy — independence of the learner in being able to apply what s/he has learnt;
- prerequisites — the knowledge, skills or qualifications needed for progression to the next stage;
- degree of complexity — in the application of knowledge and cognitive skills.

Many accreditation systems are based on more than one notion of level, e.g. BTEC combines all of them; NVQs are based on levels of supervision in an occupational role; OCNs on the increasing autonomy of the learner. However, the basis for attributing levels to awards and qualifications is not always made explicit, especially if the whole range of achievable outcomes is not defined.

Grading

Grades are widely used in assessment and accreditation. The awarding of a grade is based on a desire or need to acknowledge different levels of achievement in relation to the same level of learning. In some systems the basis for awarding a grade may be implicit; in others the criteria for grading are made clear to the learners, teachers and examiners. In many accreditation systems where grading is used, grades are arrived at by comparing learners with each other. High grades show that an individual has achieved more than the average learner, but they do not show what, precisely, they can do. Grading is associated with selection for higher level courses and employment where the performance of candidates needs to be differentiated and ranked in some way. Accreditation systems (such as GCSEs, A levels or degree programmes) based on grading rarely allow all candidates to gain an A or a first-class grade, however well they do.

In some accreditation systems, grading is based on clear criteria. However, the degree to which learners know what the criteria for assessment and grading are varies considerably from system to system. Sometimes, criteria are provided for teachers and assessors but not made explicit to the learner. In other systems, particularly in HE honours degrees, the criteria are often not explicit at all.

Grading is a contentious issue in education and training because it signifies a conflict between a system based on access at any level for anyone who has gained the necessary competence and the rationing of limited places for progression into higher levels of education, employment and professional training.

Processes of accreditation

The various bodies offering accreditation adopt different procedures and different terms for those procedures. These terms include:

Assessment

In the context of accreditation, assessment is the judgement of evidence in order to decide whether an individual learner meets the standard required for the award of a particular credit or qualification.

Traditionally, assessment for the purpose of accreditation has been carried out by a teacher or examiner, and has encompassed a range of methods and measuring techniques. These are often specified by the awarding body.

Formative assessment

Assessment is increasingly being used to diagnose a learner's needs, negotiate an action plan or learning agreement, review progress, set further learning targets and begin to identify the evidence which may be used for a final summary of achievement; assessment of this kind helps learners, teachers and trainers to make decisions about further learning.

Summative assessment

Assessment for the purposes of accreditation, on the other hand, sums up what has been achieved in order to measure the candidate against a predetermined external standard. Traditionally, summative assessment has been based on an examination, test, assignment or a project, but it may also consist of the presentation of evidence as a portfolio or record of achievement. The implementation of both summative and formative modes of assessment is still largely determined by the requirements of the awarding body and the design of learning programmes. When learning outcomes and the basis for awarding credits are clearly specified, it is possible to be more flexible in the selection and use of evidence to demonstrate achievement.

In flexible and individualised programmes for adult learners, the processes of formative and summative assessment can sometimes be carried out together, enabling the individual to have her/his experience recognised, assessed and accredited as part or whole contribution towards an award.

Norm-referencing

Norm-referenced assessment is based on grading the performance of individuals in relation to the highest and lowest standard attained by other candidates. This standard therefore varies from year to year. It is used in selection for limited places at higher levels of education, employment or training by ranking learners in order of preference.

Criterion-referencing

Criterion-referenced assessment, on the other hand, is based on clearly defined criteria. By helping the learner to be clear about what is expected and how it will be assessed, it can aid progression and make the recognition of what is being learned more effective. However, it is still common in both norm and criterion-referenced systems for teachers and examiners to assess achievement using criteria without the learner knowing what these are, or how they relate to the grading and marking structure. Many higher education programmes, for example, use criteria to derive grades and then distribute them according to the performance of other candidates in order to produce a range of attainment.

Ipsative assessment

Assessment can also be ipsative (learner-referenced) where a person's performance is assessed against her/his previous performance and her/his own criteria. Some programmes help learners to compare work they completed at the beginning and end of the course.

The various accreditation systems assess and accredit different aspects of learning achievement and many programmes use a combination of all forms of assessment.

For accreditation to provide flexibility and progression for learners, it is essential that they know and understand the assessment criteria and methods, and how assessment is related to the learning outcomes which are being achieved.

Assessment and accreditation of prior learning

Services which offer assessment and accreditation of prior learning (APL) can enable learners who can provide appropriate evidence to gain accreditation for parts of an award, or a whole qualification without having enrolled on a formal course of learning programme. Such evidence must be valid, reliable, authentic, sufficient and current. It can be provided from experience at work, in voluntary organisations and from other activities. Many awarding bodies have guidelines for offering APL but some awards are not yet constructed in ways that allow partial accreditation or a process of APL.

The process of APL is also described as assessment of prior experiential learning (APEL), accreditation of prior learning achievement (APLA) and accreditation of achievement (APA).

Certification

Certification is the formal issuing of a record which indicates that an individual has met the conditions required for the awarding of credits or a whole qualification.

When a learner has been assessed and judged to have satisfied the conditions to gain an award, a certificate can be issued by the awarding body or the institution where formal learning has been undertaken. In FE colleges, adult education services, some companies and schools, bodies such as BTEC, C&G and RSA issue their own diplomas or certificates. A college may also offer its own certificates. Open College Networks (OCN) issue their own credits and certificates for achievement on locally devised programmes. For honours degrees in universities, the awarding body is the institution itself — certification is carried out by the university.

Many work-based training programmes have their own in-house certificates as proof of attendance or skill gained; if these programmes are not part of a formally accredited award, the certificates may still be valuable for inclusion in a portfolio of evidence for the accreditation of learning towards a formal award, such as an NVQ. Terms specifically related to certification are:

Record/Certificate of Achievement

A number of accreditation systems use Records of Achievement (RoAs) in their certification. A record of modules gained, the number and level of credits and grades may also contain additional details of achievements, previous qualifications, testimonials, letters of confirmation from employers. An RoA can therefore cover a wide range of life and work experience or refer specifically to a particular learning programme. It is either completed at the end of a programme or is the culmination of an ongoing process of reviewing and recording achievement over a period of time. The degree of learner involvement in contributing to the Record of Achievement and the amount of detail provided vary considerably, depending on how the RoA is used for certification.

Some systems (BTEC, C&G) use a Certificate or Record of Achievement or a Unit Certificate (RSA) to show attainment of modules or components gained from learning programmes or from APL.

National Record of Achievement

The government has asked NCVQ to administer a National Record of Achievement for all post-school education and training to promote the recording of an individual's achievement through life. Qualifications and units of NVQs are recorded whenever these are gained, but it is also intended to incorporate evidence of other achievements.

Credit Record/ Summary

A document summarising the titles and numbers of credits gained by a learner. In OCN systems, it includes details of the programme completed and/or learning outcomes achieved.

Profile Some accreditation systems use a student or learner profile in their certification. Like an RoA, it is a summary of achievement, showing the credits gained from an accredited programme of learning. It may also provide details of particular skills and how far the learner has acquired them; some therefore have rating scales to show achievement.

Validation

Validation is the formal process of authorising an organisation to offer a learning programme which meets the requirements of the awarding body.

The process can be used to:

- evaluate the centre's ability to offer and assess programmes designed by the awarding body (C&G, RSA);
- evaluate the design and coherence of the learning programme (OCNs, BTEC).

The terms approval and recognition are used in some systems to refer to the process of validation.

Validation may be carried out either by panels of representatives from an awarding body, professional experts, employers and practitioners or a representative of the awarding body. In OCNs, recognition panels of tutors and professionals with relevant expertise are used.

Centres and providers usually show how a programme of learning will be organised through a written proposal (sometimes known as a submission) which may cover a range of issues such as resourcing, content, delivery, assessment methods and staff roles, examples of learning assignments, and intended learning outcomes. This then forms the basis for quality assurance, evaluation and review. Different systems have different requirements and the scope and detail vary, as does the contribution which the process of validation can make to curriculum and professional development for the staff.

In some systems, validation confers approval for an organisation to run a scheme or programme by scrutinising the centre itself rather than requiring a detailed proposal to be made. Validation may be granted for a limited period of time. It is then subject to renewal and a process of evaluation and review.

Franchising

Franchising is the formal granting of a licence or contract to run learning programmes on behalf of centres who have already been validated.

It is becoming increasingly common for universities to offer all or part of their awards through other centres, such as FE colleges. The final award is given on behalf of the awarding body by the centre authorised by the awarding body to run the programme, but the teaching, assessment and learner support is carried out by the staff from the franchised centre.

The same arrangements as for validation usually apply to franchised programmes. The centre issuing the franchise is responsible to the awarding body for all aspects of quality assurance, monitoring and staff development. In the same way, some FE colleges franchise BTEC First Diploma programmes to schools. This model is also used for the franchising of FE provision from an FE college to an Adult Education service under the Further and Higher Education Act 1992.

Moderation

Moderation is a process of review and evaluation which ensures that the operation of a learning programme and the assessment of learning achievements continue to meet the recognised standards.

In some systems, when a course or programme has been validated, the awarding bodies (such as BTEC and OCNs) undertake a process of moderation. This is usually carried out by representatives of the awarding body. Delivery of learning, facilities, staff roles, as well as the methods of assessment, awarding of grades and levels, and the internal quality assurance of a centre are reviewed and evaluated by moderators in conjunction with staff and organisational managers. Moderation is often seen as a supportive contribution to staff and curriculum development.

In other systems (such as RSA and C&G), moderation has traditionally meant a process of ensuring that examination papers and marking procedures maintain a certain standard and complexity. The term can therefore describe very different activities.

Verification

Verification is a process of checking that assessment is carried out in accordance with the criteria laid down by the awarding body.

There is considerable overlap between the processes of verification and moderation.

Some forms of accreditation (such as that used for NVQs) use verification in place of, or in addition to, moderation. Verifiers ensure that the specified standards for assessment and appropriate criteria are adhered to by a centre's assessors and that adequate records are kept. The verifier's formal role emphasises assessment procedures and standards rather than learning processes and staff roles.

The distinction between moderation and verification reflects different notions of quality control and assurance in the various accreditation systems. Verification emphasises external monitoring to ensure that the standards for assessment defined and specified by the awarding body are adhered to. Moderation encompasses evaluation of the processes of learning and programme delivery, assessment methods, staffing and resourcing, as well as the end result of assessment.

The degree of scrutiny of learning, assessment and standards is therefore different in each accreditation system and also varies between individual moderators and verifiers themselves. The issue about which process is appropriate is particularly evident in NVQs which stress that mode/duration/place of learning are irrelevant since assessment of competence is the crucial factor. However, many accreditation systems are increasingly combining processes of moderation and verification.

Awarding Bodies

Unlike many other countries, Britain has no national system to control the setting up of examining or awarding bodies. Anyone can offer examinations and issue certificates but these are more likely to be recognised by others as a useful qualification if organisations are authorised to offer accreditation through Royal Charter, a Government directive or a request from institutions or other bodies. There are very many organisations offering accreditation in Britain including an increasing number of professional bodies. The term awarding body is therefore used here to cover this whole range of agencies.

The development of each awarding body reflects various traditions in different sectors of education and training, in the acquisition of craft and apprenticeship skills, in academic education and in professional recruitment and development. Concern about the wide range of accreditation processes, levels of qualifications and their relevance to occupational requirements led to the setting up of NCVQ by the Government in 1986. NCVQ aims to rationalise all vocational qualifications, covering 80% of the workforce, into a national framework by 1992.

Bodies offering accreditation may also undertake the validation, moderation/verification and certification of learning programmes. However, they each have different requirements and degrees of involvement in these processes. The scope and remit of the different bodies vary considerably, as does knowledge amongst employers, teachers and learners about what the different credits or qualifications represent in terms of content and currency.

National awarding bodies

Those involved in the accreditation of adult learning include:

- Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC);
- City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G);
- RSA Examinations Board (RSA);
- Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA).

The awarding bodies have arrangements for the validation, moderation/verification and certification of their awards. They specify assessment and examination arrangements as well as criteria for enabling a programme or centre to be validated. Some also require centres to promote certain principles of learning, teaching quality, programme content and assessment methods which support the learning process.

Examining boards

Examining boards are also responsible for the design of syllabuses and the setting of examinationsfor academic and vocational awards such as A levels and GCSEs. Examples of these are:

- Joint Matriculation Board;
- Southern Examining Group;
- some Regional Advisory Councils (see below).

Examining and validating bodies

Sometimes the term Examining and Validating Bodies (EVBs) or Awarding Bodies are used as generic terms to refer to organisations which offer accreditation. NCVQ use the term awarding body to refer to any organisation awarding NVQs.

Higher education institutions

Universities are awarding bodies for their own degrees under Royal Charter.

Professional bodies

A large number of professional bodies offer their own accreditation and increasingly validate centres to run courses and programmes in further, higher and adult education. Amongst these are:

- Nursery Nursing Examining Board (NNEB);
- National Examining Board for Supervisory Management (NEBSM);
- Construction Industry Training Board (CITB);
- Institute of Personnel Management (IPM);
- Engineering Training Authority (ETA).

Sometimes accreditation for programmes leading to professional awards is carried out in conjunction with other awarding bodies. For example, CNAA validates the training offered by Sotheby's and BTEC validates training offered by the Institute of Recreation and Leisure Amenity Management. BTEC, OCNs, C&G and RSA all validate programmes for specific companies and organisations.

An increasing number of professional bodies are using flexible methods of delivery and credit-based systems of accreditation to widen access to their programmes.

Membership bodies

Some membership bodies also validate courses and learning programmes:

- trades unions;
- National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux;
- chambers of commerce;
- National Federation of Women's Institutes.

Regional Advisory Councils

Some Reginal Advisory Councils (RACs) such as the Yorkshire and HumbersideAssociation for Further and Higher Education (YHAFHE) East Midlands Further Education Council (EMFEC) offer accreditation for particular local programmes. They also offer programmes of updating and in-service training for teachers, trainers and tutors, relating to different accreditation systems. Some RACs are also examining bodies and set their own syllabuses and examinations.

Open College Networks

OCNs are locally based and controlled networks which operate within a national framework provided through the National Open College Network (NOCN). They offer accreditation for locally designed programmes based in work places, the community, voluntary organisations or colleges. OCNs award credits and certificates for achievement on their recognised programmes.

Lead bodies

In the system of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) being set up by the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) representatives from employers, employees and the self-employed in a particular occupational area are requested by the Employment Department to form an industry lead body. This body describes and specifies national occupational standards; the NCVQ then ensures that only those vocational qualifications issued by awarding bodies which incorporate these occupational standards are accredited as an NVQ.

Some lead bodies are also awarding bodies for their own NVQs (e.g. the Telecommunications Vocational Standards Council).

Designing learning programmes for accreditation

Some terms related to the design of programmes leading to accreditation are:

Module

A module is a unit of delivery based on an identifiable or assessable part of a learning programme or course.

In some accreditation systems, this term is often used interchangeably with 'unit' or 'credit'. In designing a learning programme, modularisation is a way of splitting a whole course into smaller parts (modules) that can be assessed and accredited separately. Some schemes relate module outcomes to the awarding of a credit directly; others offer several credits for a single module, possibly at more than one level.

Modularisation is widely practised in all sectors of education and training. Some schemes have a consistent module size, based on hours of learning over a specified time. This uniformity simplifies timetabling and admissions but can lead to reduced flexibility for the learner. Schemes with modules of various sizes can accommodate a wide range of programmes, such as short courses. Other modules are based solely on a finite and coherent set of learning outcomes or content; learning and assessment are enhanced where attention is paid to deliver modules with specific and coherent outcomes.

The growing number of modular, unit and credit-based schemes in FE, HE and AE seek to increase the flexibility of education and training programmes by allowing:

- assessment and accreditation of prior learning;
- clearer definition of an individual learner's requirements for accreditation;
- different rates of progress;
- the creation of individualised programmes;
- response to changing demand by adding, updating and removing modules from programmes rather than having to redesign the whole programme.

Many providers are anxious to ensure that modularising programmes does not lead to a loss of coherence. However, there is no agreement on who should decide what combination of learning opportunities is coherent, since learners may choose combinations which make sense to them and their progression.

but which teachers and providers see as fragmented and disparate. The role of educational guidance is therefore crucial in assisting learners to make decisions about designing a programme which best suits their needs.

Courses

Courses may be long, short, part-time or full-time and are often designed to meet the specifications of content, assessment and accreditation laid down by an awarding body. Traditionally, many qualifications have been linked to courses with the same title for both. This can cause confusion when attempts are made to increase flexibility by separating the two.

Programmes

Programme is often used rather than course to stress flexibility and the design of provision to suit specific target groups. A programme can combine modules, assessment methods and access to accreditation in a variety of ways. Programmes can be designed for individual learners and take place in a range of settings. Many people design their own programme of learning, working independently with books, videos and peers.

Schemes

Some forms of accreditation (e.g. C&G) do not refer to courses or programmes but instead offer learning opportunities referred to as schemes.

Units

The terms module, credit and unit are often used to mean the same thing. A unit may therefore refer to a unit of delivery (module) or a unit of value (credit).

Outcomes

Outcomes are all the gains of learning. This term is sometimes confused with outputs. Outcomes may be specific occupational competences, specified knowledge, cognitive and processing skills acquired through the use and application of knowledge, personal skills such as improved communication or more intangible things such as increased confidence, motivation, social status. A clear definition of the intended outcomes of a programme enables more conscious and explicit links to be made between assessment and learning methods. An education and training system based on much clearer definitions and assessment of outcomes could reduce the emphasis on grading for selection and progression.

Outputs

Outputs are usually more narrowly defined than outcomes and are therefore easier to assess. Some vocational programmes are funded on the basis of outputs: giving resources to training agencies which achieve agreed targets, usually the attainment of specified awards or admission to specified courses or employment. There is a danger that an emphasis on narrow outputs will lead to a distortion of learning programmes by excluding other important outcomes of learning.

Section 3

Examples of Accreditation Systems

This section is based on information provided by the awarding bodies themselves. It describes how some accreditation systems operate and attempts to clarify how the different systems interpret and use some of the terms outlined in the previous section. Some of the bodies are currently reviewing their accreditation processes.

Publications associated with each system which may be of general use for providers, practitioners and learners are listed. Some of them provide useful guidance on issues such as assessment, core skills and designing learning programmes.

> This section does not attempt to cover all the accrediting systems which might be relevant to adult learners, although it describes many of the major ones. However, our attention was drawn, after publication of the first edition of this document, to the extensive use which has traditionally been made of the Pitmans Examinations Institute by adult education institutions. The Institute's address is listed, together with those of the other bodies described, at the end of this report.

National Council for Vocational Qualifications

NCVQ was set up by the government in 1986 with a national remit and operates centrally, reporting directly to Government ministers.

NCVQ is responsible for establishing a framework of NVQs which will eventually cover all occupations. It is also Government policy that funding for full-time vocational programmes in the public sector will be linked to the attainment of NVQs. The NCVQ uses the term accreditation specifically to refer to the processes it uses to accredit qualifications based on the specification of National Standards which are being developed by lead bodies to cover all occupational areas. National Standards describe levels of performance required in occupational areas. The role of NCVQ is to ensure that all vocational qualifications which are designed and awarded by a range of awarding bodies (such as BTEC, RSA, C&G) incorporate and meet these standards. It does not award its own certificates.

In some occupational areas neither standards nor qualifications currently exist. The Employment Department is responsible for establishing and encouraging new lead bodies; NCVQ will only accredit qualifications which incorporate occupational standards specified by lead bodies.

Vocational qualifications both inside and outside the NCVQ framework are awarded by a number of awarding bodies in the UK and cover a range of occupational areas and levels. The role of NCVQ is to accredit all vocational qualifications and place them within the national framework. Accredited qualifications will be given the NVQ insignia or kitemark, but certificates will continue to be issued by the awarding bodies themselves.

NCVQ does not specify the design and delivery of a particular vocational qualification. It will not, for example, require a specific number of units for each qualification nor a particular range of units or particular kind of course. Awarding bodies must satisfy a strict range of criteria in order to offer an NVQ. Some of these criteria are that the qualification:

- is recognised for the purpose of employment;
- is appropriate to one of the levels in the NVQ framework;
- provides flexibility in employment, enabling the holder to respond to changes in technology, markets and occupations;
- does not have restricted access nor age-related requirements;
- does not specify mode, duration or location of learning;
- provides a suitable basis for progression to higher levels of education, employment or training.

Qualifications may be presented in units for the purposes of assessment. They should help to structure learning programmes and also facilitate APL processes. They should not specify set courses or other ways of learning.

The NVQ framework

NCVQ has set up a framework for the accreditation of vocational qualifications. The framework currently operates at five levels and will eventually include professional qualifications and awards.

Levels

The existing five level framework of NVQs indicates different levels of attainment of vocational competence, reflecting the ability to perform defined work-related activities to prescribed standards at increasing levels of responsibility. The framework is intended to encourage the development of individuals laterally by extending the range of work-related activities in which competence can be achieved and upwards to indicate progressive increments in competence.

Level 1	Competence in the performance of a range of work activities which are primarily routine and predictable, or provide a broad foundation, primarily as a basis for progression.
Level 2	Competence in a broader and more demanding range of work activities involving greater individual responsibility and autonomy than at Level 1.
Level 3	Competence in skilled areas that involve performance of a broad range of work activities, including many that are complex and non-routine. In some areas, supervisory competence may be a requirement at this level.
Level 4	Competence in the performance of complex, technical, specialised and professional work activities including those associated with design, planning and problem solving, normally carrying a significant degree of personal accountability. In many areas competence in supervision or management will be a requirement at this level.
Level 5	Competence which involves the application of a significant range of fundamental principles and complex techniques across a wide and often unpredictable range of contexts in the performance of strategic and organisation planning. Roles involve very substantial degrees of personal autonomy and responsibility for the work of others and for the allocation of substantial resources. People may also be personally accountable for analysis and diagnosis, design, planning, implementation and evaluation.

The skills achieved at this level will be sufficiently extensive to indicate capacity for senior management.

NCVQ levels are not intended to relate directly to time periods; they do not represent years or stages of learning. Levels relate to the attainment of outcomes and the time taken to achieve them will depend on the nature and range of the standards and on the programmes and modes of delivery of learning. Attainment of competence may not depend on any course or learning programme, but is demonstrated by the collection of evidence for assessment.

Standards

Accreditation in NCVQ differs fundamentally from that in other systems since it relies on employment-led, industry standards specified nationally. Standards are described by lead bodies and specify the activity, level of attainment, performance criteria and the range of ways in which attainment must be demonstrated.

Validation, verification, moderation and quality assurance

These processes are the responsibility of the awarding body delivering the NVQ. NCVQ ensures that the processes are appropriate and provides guidelines for the verification of competence-based assessment. Occupational standards for the role of verifier have been developed by the Training Development Lead Body (TDLB) and some awarding bodies are offering these for the accreditation of staff training.

Assessment

Assessment is specified and carried out through the units of competence. These are broken down into elements of competences, performance criteria and the contexts where competence has to be demonstrated. The emphasis is on the demonstration of occupational competence regardless of how or where this is acquired; criteria are therefore clear to the learner.

Units

An NCVQ unit is entirely different from units used in other accreditation systems. It is not a unit of learning or a unit of time, but part of an occupational role.

NCVQ does not use the word credit in the same way as other accreditation systems. The unit is the basic building block of the NVQ framework and of the vocational qualification; it is the smallest part of a vocational qualification which can be separately assessed and certificated. Units are the smallest separable components of occupational performance and are arrived at by breaking down the functions of a particular occupational role; this process is called functional analysis. Units are therefore not all the same size and some are large and complex, whilst others are relatively small and simple. NVQ units are not equal in value, nor are they equal in terms of the notional or actual time which a student might take to learn them.

General National Vocational Qualifications

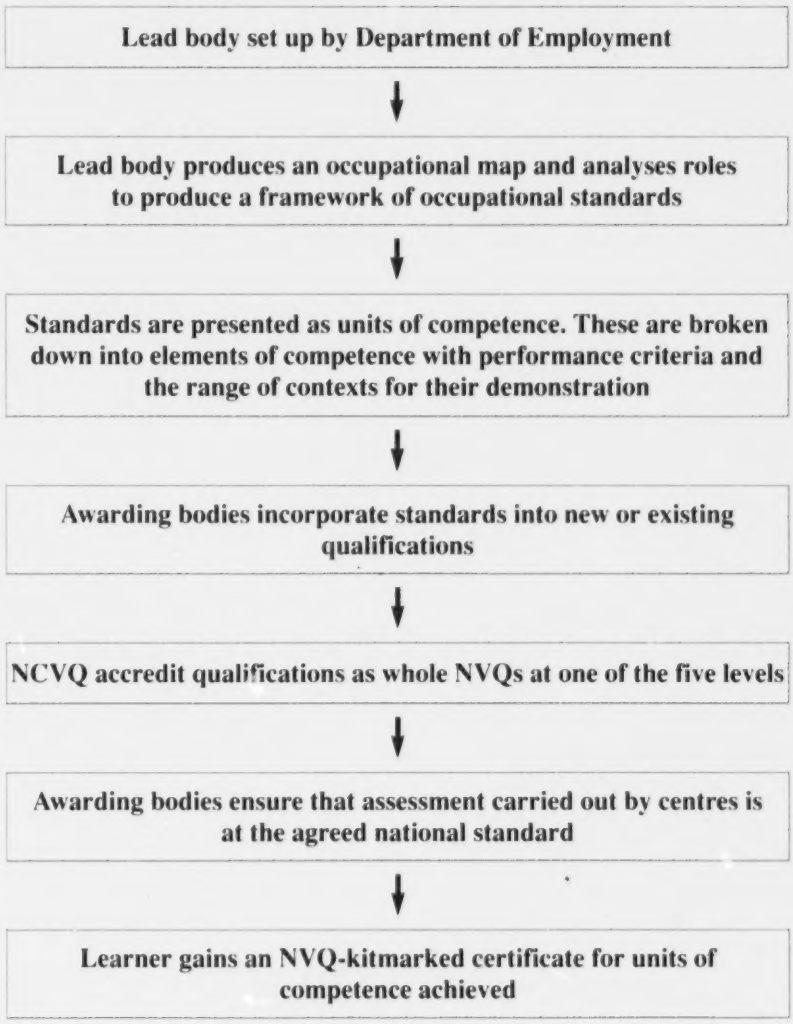
NCVQ has been asked by the government to design qualifications at levels 2-4 in the NVQ framework to provide a bridge between academic and vocational qualifications. These will allow general study in a vocational area and will require the assessment of core skills. They will not, however, assess occupational competence.

NCVQ Publications

NCVQ publishes a range of material explaining what NVQs are and how they are intended to work. These include:

Brief guides	*The NVQ Framework* *The National Database* *The National Record*
Notes	*Access and Equal Opportunities* *Europe* *Unpaid work*
Quarterly newsletter	*NVQ Update*
Action packs	*Material for staff development programmes* *NVQs and Prior Learning* *NVQs and unpaid work* *Recording Achievement*

NCVQ accreditation process


Lead body set up by Department of Employment
Lead body produces an occupational map and analyses roles to produce a framework of occupational standards
Standards are presented as units of competence. These are broken down into elements of competence with performance criteria and the range of contexts for their demonstration
Awarding bodies incorporate standards into new or existing qualifications
NCVQ accredit qualifications as whole NVQs at one of the five levels
Awarding bodies ensure that assessment carried out by centres is at the agreed national standard
Learner gains an NVQ-kitmarked certificate for units of competence achieved

Open College Networks

OCNs recognise learning programmes, and award credits to individual learners. They are locally based and controlled networks operating within a national framework provided through the National Open College Network (NOCN). They offer accreditation for a range of locally designed learning programmes delivered in a range of settings, including workplaces, voluntary and community organisations, adult education centres, FE colleges and HE institutions. They aim to provide a bridge between informal learning in a variety of settings and the formal ladders of qualifications. The following list indicates the range of programmes and providers:

Introduction to independent living	HM prison
Core skills for adults	FE college
Jewellery design	AE service
Flowers for all occasions	Women's Institute
Community performance	Theatre
Access to social work	FE college
Womens' studies: Access to HE	FE college
Parents in education	Workers Educational Association
Being a school governor	University
So you want to teach	University
Carnival arts	AE institute

Open College Network

OCN is a generic term referring to Open College Networks and Federations, Access Federations and consortia which are members of the National Open College Network and therefore operate its agreed accreditation framework.

This accreditation framework establishes:

- four levels based on stages of learning;
- an agreed definition of a credit;
- peer group processes of recognition through cross-sector, cross-organisation peer group panels;
- moderation of all programmes;
- mutual recognition of credits issued by all members of NOCN. OCNs award credits. They are also authorised validating agencies for Access to HE courses and therefore issue kitemarked Access Certificates (See

Access Courses Recognition Group pp55-57). Currently this is the only qualification that they award. Increasingly, equivalences with other qualifications are being established to facilitate progression from OCN programmes to academic and vocational qualifications. NCVQ has also funded work through UDACE to look at how NVQ units incorporated within OCN-accredited programmes can be recognised towards full NVQs.

Levels

OCNs recognise learning opportunities at four levels which refer to the various stages and degrees of complexity and independence of learning, from basic skills acquisition to preparation for HE. They do not correspond to the NVQ levels.

Level 1	The development of basic skills concepts and practical activity.
Level 2	The consolidation of existing skills and the introduction of new skills, competences and areas of learning.
Level 3	The extension and application of skills and competences and the introduction of independent learning techniques.
Level 4	The development and independent application of a range of critical, reflective, creative and problem-solving skills and competences.

OCNs have an unusually flexible accreditation system in that they allow tutors to design learning programmes which are offered at several levels. This requires that the learning outcomes and assessment criteria for each level are clearly described so that learners can work at an appropriate level and have their achievements recognised. For example, a learner may gain credits at Level 2 and at Level 3 for different parts of the same programme, by satisfying the agreed outcomes and criteria.

Credits

OCN credits are a mechanism for ascribing value to learning outcomes, rather than detailing all the skills or competences achieved. They provide a currency which can measure achievement in learning consistently across all areas.

OCN credits are based on the outcomes of learning and on a judgement of the notional learning time required to achieve them. In all OCNs, one credit is equal to the outcomes which could be achieved by an average learner in 30 hours notional learning time including taught, private and practical time.

OCNs refer to notional time because credit value is based on what is agreed to be a reasonable estimation of the time necessary to achieve particular learning outcomes. The credit value set as a result of this estimation does not vary according to the actual time a learner requires to achieve these learning outcomes.

Accreditation

The OCN accreditation approach is fundamentally different from that of other awarding bodies in that OCNs primarily accredit programmes designed by tutors and trainers for particular groups. OCNs do not design and issue their own syllabuses. They encourage collaborative approaches to curriculum design across sectors and organisations. An important feature of the accreditation process is that it is carried out by peer group panels consisting of tutors, trainers and others with relevant expertise.

Accreditation is used to refer to a two stage process of recognition and moderation.

Recognition

Recognition is the process by which the design of learning programmes is reviewed, modified and recognised by the OCN. Tutors are supported through the recognition process by a development officer from the OCN. Tutors present their programme to a panel of tutors experienced in the particular curriculum area. The recognition panel reviews the internal consistency and coherence of the programme and pays particular attention to:

- the target group for whom the course has been designed;
- the aims of the programme and its intended learning outcomes;
- the assessment methods and criteria.

Issues considered by the recognition panel include:

- whether the programme is appropriate to the target group;
- whether it draws on the values and experience of the learners;
- how it is organised to suit the particular group;
- how the content and organisation of the course relates to its aims;
- how learners can be accredited for their achievement if they leave a programme before the end;
- what will be assessed and by whom;
- what criteria will be used to measure achievement.

The recognition process is designed to be rigorous but supportive. All tutors at the recognition panel have a vested interest in ensuring the quality of the credits issued, and the majority of members of the panel are external to the submitting organisation, often from a different sector or LEA. The process allows the sharing of experience by practitioners from different sectors and institutions and therefore can be a vehicle for staff and curriculum development.

The recognition panel agrees the level and credit values of the programme and identifies issues which need to be reviewed during moderation.

Moderation

Moderation is the process through which the operation of the programme in practice is reviewed, learners' achievements are verified and the consistent application of the accreditation framework is ensured. It begins with the application of assessment procedures by course tutors who make recommendations for credit awards, and continues with in-course visits by independent moderators.

The role of the moderator is to be supportive and collaborative and the process is intended to provide a staff development opportunity for both the tutor and moderator.

The final stage is normally achieved through a peer group moderation meeting, which comprises the moderator and the tutors from three-to-four courses in similar areas for which the moderator is responsible. Samples of assessment from all the programmes are reviewed and agreement reached on recommendations for the award of credits. The meeting also reviews the operation of the programme, and provides opportunities for tutors to share experience and seek advice and support. The moderator then reports to the OCN on any refinements or changes needed in the recognised programmes. The moderation meeting may recommend, for example, that a programme is resubmitted to a recognition panel if substantial changes are required.

Registration

This term is used in some OCNs to refer to a learning programme being recognised and entered on their records. It is also used to refer to the registration of the learner with the OCN to receive credits. Learners can also join recognised programmes without registering with the OCN for credits.

Certification

In OCNs this refers to the award of credits to learners. Learners are awarded a number of credits at particular levels and these are issued in a Credit Record. Details of the learning outcomes achieved by learners of the programme are included in the Credit Record.

Assessment

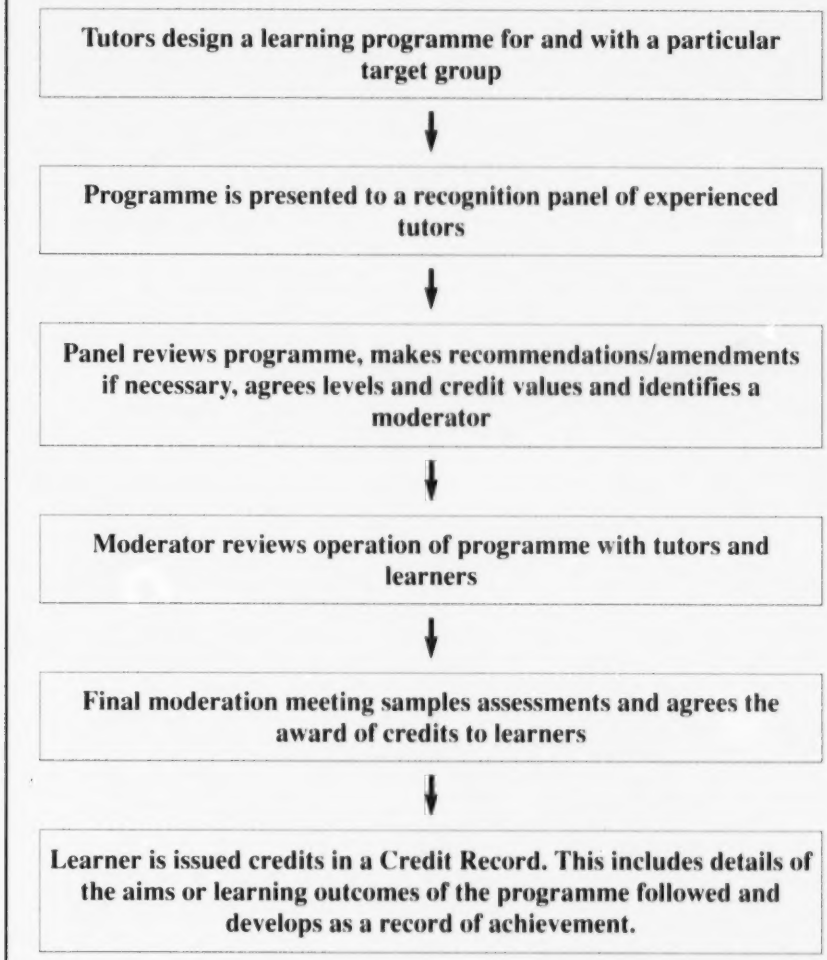
In OCNs assessment is criterion rather than norm-referenced and may cover a wide range of learning outcomes. For example, a maths course may include outcomes in mathematical achievement, communication skills and self confidence. OCN learners can negotiate learning outcomes appropriate to themselves with the tutor and these can be assessed and accredited as part of the course. Learners can demonstrate that they have achieved the outcomes in a wide range of ways and different assessment methods can be used for individuals on the same course.

Open College Network Publications

Open College Networks: Current Development and Practice
Developing Open College Networks
Open College Networks and NVQs
Open College Networks: the Handbook
Assessment in Open College Networks
Thinking Spaces: An Experiment in Staff Development for Open College Networks

All the above are available from the Further Education Unit.

The OCN accreditation process


Tutors design a learning programme for and with a particular target group
Programme is presented to a recognition panel of experienced tutors
Panel reviews programme, makes recommendations/amendments if necessary, agrees levels and credit values and identifies a moderator
Moderator reviews operation of programme with tutors and learners
Final moderation meeting samples assessments and agrees the award of credits to learners
Learner is issued credits in a Credit Record. This includes details of the aims or learning outcomes of the programme followed and develops as a record of achievement.

Note:

The Open College: There are no formal links between OCNs and The Open College which is an entirely separate government initiative established in 1986. The Open College is concerned with open learning and in particular, distance learning.

Business and Technology Education Council

BTEC is a national awarding body set up by the Department of Education and Science (now the Department for Education) to offer qualifications in a wide range of occupational areas at different levels of role and responsibility.

It validates programmes or modules leading to BTEC qualifications to be offered in a range of centres (including FE, HE, companies, training centres and schools). The centre is responsible for the quality of its own programme, but BTEC has overall responsibility for the consistency and comparability of standards. Programmes are reviewed and evaluated through a process of moderation and verification by externally appointed representatives of BTEC.

Programmes are offered in the following areas:

- agriculture
- business and finance
- caring services
- computing and IT systems
- construction
- design
- distribution
- engineering
- home economics
- horticulture
- hotel and catering
- housing
- information technology
- leisure services
- management
- public administration
- science

Centres can run whole, half or double modules and a programme is made up of a combination of these within a specified framework. There are guidelines in each subject area provided by BTEC, which provide a framework for a programme and any essential specified elements. This guidance has been developed using advice and expertise from practitioners and employers and incorporating lead body standards for NVQs when these are available.

Certificates and diplomas

BTEC qualifications are offered in two forms. Certificates are for learners in employment gaining experience additional to their study; diplomas are usually taken by learners on a full-time basis.

BTEC Awards are offered as follows:

BTEC First Diploma/Certificate develops skills as a foundation for work or further study.

BTEC National Diploma/Certificate develops skills in junior management/supervisory and technician roles. It is designed to be equivalent to two A levels.

BTEC Higher National Diploma/Certificate prepares learners for roles with greater technician, management and supervisory responsibilities. It is equivalent to an ordinary degree.

BTEC Continuing Education Programmes provides a range of modules for adults who want to retrain or develop new skills.

Credits

BTEC does not use credits as a mechanism for ascribing value to learning outcomes but it uses a system of modules to define and describe parts of programmes leading to its qualifications. A module is a unit of delivery based on 60-80 hours learning support time. This includes supervised and directed learning including private study and work experience. Credits are awarded for whole, half or double modules.

Programmes

BTEC uses this as a general term to encompass conventional courses, in-company schemes, open and distance-learning and assessment-only arrangements.

Assessment

Assessment of BTEC modules and common skills is criterion-referenced; criteria are used to arrive at an overall grade which is recorded on the final certificate as pass/merit/distinction. The criteria are made clear to learners so that they know the basis for awarding grades. For NVQ and continuing education provision, assessment is criterion-referenced and the result is recorded as pass/not yet passed.

BTEC programmes comprise a series of essential modules in particular subject areas; BTEC specify which common skills should be included in each subject and offer a series of optional modules. The common skills are a fundamental part of BTEC qualifications at National, First, and Higher National levels. Common skills refer to generic, transferable skills such as communication, working with and relating to others, managing tasks and solving problems, applying numeracy, applying technology, applying design and creativity. These are known as core skills in other accreditation systems.

BTEC provides guidelines for the implementation and assessment of common skills.

Validation

The validation process aims to establish a contract between BTEC and a centre. The contract sets out how the centre intends to deliver the standards defined in BTEC guidelines and programme specifications.

Before a centre can offer a programme leading to a BTEC qualification, it must apply for approval. This is the validation process and centres must show:

- why the programme is needed (this must demonstrate local and national market research including consultation with employers);
- programme content;
- teaching, learning and assessment strategies;
- human and physical resources available;
- processes for reviewing and updating the programme;
- internal quality assurance mechanisms;
- assessing and accrediting prior learning (APL) processes.

These are set out in a submission form provided by BTEC. For the majority of submissions, the proposals are scrutinised by a panel comprising staff from colleges, employers and BTEC advisers. Currently, if the proposal meets the validation criteria, it is given approval for up to five years.

Joint validation

For some centres, BTEC validate some Higher National and Continuing Education programmes at the centre itself, through a panel of BTEC representatives, the centre staff and other external members (including employers) involved in delivering the programme. Programmes demonstrating continuous high quality can be given extended approval at these centres.

Franchising

An increasing number of centres are developing partnerships with other centres (e.g. schools/colleges, HE institutions/colleges, work-place/colleges) to deliver approved programmes. Centres seek approval from BTEC which then approves arrangements to ensure that contractual and quality assurance agreements are made between centres.

Joint certification

BTEC has agreements with a number of companies and organisations to accredit training programmes offered to employees. These include the Institute of Recreation and Leisure Amenity Management, British Telecom, British Gas and the Post Office. BTEC will also assist centres in designing customised programmes.

Moderation

A process of moderation and monitoring enables standards to be compared between centres and between differently named BTEC qualifications at similar levels regionally and nationally.

Moderators work for BTEC on a part-time basis and are generally employed full-time in education, industry or commerce. They work in partnership with centres to ensure that:

- centres adhere to the learning and assessment strategies which were outlined in the original submission;
- programmes continue to reflect the changing needs of industry and commerce;
- centres assess learner performance appropriately, fairly and consistently;
- national standards in BTEC qualifications are maintained.

Each moderator is assigned to several centres so that comparisons between programmes can be made. Moderators visit each centre regularly and review the progress of programmes with learners, teachers and institutional managers. They produce reports which focus on management of the programmes, teaching and learning strategies, assessment, review and evaluation procedures. A judgement is made about each of these areas, using criteria produced by BTEC. Centres are encouraged to use the same criteria in their own review and evaluation processes. The moderation process is designed to be a consultative and supportive process which supports staff and curriculum development. Moderators provide advice to the centres on all aspects of BTEC provision; reviewing programmes with the learners is seen to be important as is enabling teachers to review their own standards.

Lead moderators co-ordinate a team of 35-40 moderators and three to five centres to monitor the quality of overall provision. They can provide guidance to individual moderators and follow up areas of concern and exemplary good practice in different centres. The moderation process is intended to provide BTEC with evidence on which to base future approval and reapproval of centres and programmes. It also provides information for new moderators. BTEC offer a programme of moderator training and encourage the dissemination of good practice and areas of concern.

Verification

As more NVQ units are included in BTEC programmes, existing procedures and functions of moderators are being reviewed. The role of verifiers required by NCVQ is being taken on by a number of existing moderators to support those programmes with NVQ accreditation. Individuals appointed to this role will be certificated as external verifiers through the occupational standards developed by the Training Development Lead Body.

Monitoring

Because assessment is carried out in centres, BTEC ensures standards are uniform; the monitoring function therefore enables BTEC to use national and regional comparisons to ensure that specifications for the delivery of programmes are met. It provides information for the revalidation process, confirmation of the findings of moderators, and an independent quality audit through monitoring the quality assurance procedures of BTEC and the centres.

A number of monitoring exercises are carried out and these provide a check on such things as the standards of grading, predictions about learner performance, the appropriateness of assessment materials and methods, and the overall effectiveness of the range of BTEC provision. BTEC informs centres of the results and findings from these exercises.

BTEC and NVQs

BTEC offers a range of NVQs for a range of occupational standards at different NVQ levels. As lead body standards are made available, they will be offered by BTEC. Centres can apply for approval to offer NVQ/BTEC units. The final certificate will show achievement of NVQ units at the relevant NVQ level through the NCVQ kitemark.

BTEC is working with the NCVQ on the development of GNVQs.

BTEC Publications

BTEC produces a range of general guidelines, sample learning activities, research material, staff development guidelines and curriculum support material for all their subject areas. Publications include:

Opportunities for Adults
Teaching and Learning Strategies
Common Skills and Core Themes
Course and Unit Design
Assessment and Grading
Implementing Open Learning
Course Review and Evaluation
Accreditation of Prior Learning
Handbooks for Moderators
Franchising — a guide
Credit
Flexible Study Routes

BTEC accreditation process

A centre applies to BTEC with a submission to run a particular programme or to request the design of a customised module

↓

A BTEC panel scrutinises the programme, makes recommendations or requests amendments and approves the programme

↓

A BTEC moderator/verifier reviews the operation of the programme with tutors and learners

↓

Moderator/verifier agrees grades and/or NVQ assessments and produces a report

↓

BTEC issues certificates/records of achievement for whole qualifiactions or modules

City and Guilds of London Institute

C&G is authorised through Royal Charter to offer external qualifications for a broad range of occupations, skills and roles as well as certificates for technical and leisure activities and general education. Programmes are offered in approved centres such as colleges, training centres, companies and adult education institutes, including centres overseas. Programmes are run on a part-time, day-release, full-time or evening basis. Some C&G qualifications can be gained through a distance-learning format.

Qualifications are offered for a range of industries:

- agriculture and horticulture
- business administration
- caring
- clothing, footwear, leather
- computing/IT
- construction
- electronic and electrical industries
- hairdressing and beauty
- hotels and catering
- mechanical engineering
- motor vehicles
- retail and wholesale distribution
- training/supervision
- travel, tourism and leisure.

C & G qualifications are available at several levels:

- pre-vocational;
- occupational (there are three levels within this range of qualifications and levels are based on the increasing complexity of skills, use oftechnology and autonomy required for the occupational role);
- career extension, either occupational or general;
- senior professional graduateship, membership, and fellowship.

Where C&G qualifications are accredited as NVQs, the specified level conforms to the NVQ framework.

Schemes

In C&G accreditation, schemes refer to learning programmes in whatever format these are offered. The suggested syllabus content, assessment or examination arrangements are published for each scheme and subdivided into components which may be taken as separate free-standing examinations or

assessments and listed on a C&G Record of Achievement. C&G does not specifically prescribe patterns or lengths of study and approved centres may enter any candidate they consider to have a reasonable chance of success. There are no formal entry requirements.

Schemes are divided into:

- those available to approved centres;
- those developed in liaison with other organisations (companies, professional bodies, colleges etc.) to respond to particular needs and situations which are available on demand;
- those available only with agreement from C&G and the named organisations.

C&G can help organisations develop and validate customised training programmes and provide assessment leading to a certificate. Clients include individual firms, industry training boards, training centres and colleges. C&G will organise the administration of assessments itself or advise clients on how to do it.

Credit

C&G does not use credit to ascribe a value to learning outcomes; where the term is used, it refers to a grade or point for assessment, e.g. credit/pass/fail.

Modules/units

C&G refers to the smallest parts of its schemes which are available for assessment and accreditation as component.

Accumulation of components

Each of the different levels of qualifications can be obtained by a process of accumulating different components. There are two main ways of obtaining this: by passing standard written or practical tests, or by completing local assessments monitored by C&G. A computer system records successes of individual learners in gaining components and these are listed in a record of achievement. Certificates are issued during eight processing periods over the year.

Assessment

C&G uses a variety of forms of assessment and these include continuous course work, work-place assessment, or structured and standard tests. Standard written or practical tests are administered up to eight times a year. Other forms of assessment are used more frequently and skills tests are available on demand. A number can be provided by arrangement with industrial training centres, colleges or other approved centres. A number of schemes and assessments are available to candidates outside the UK and some overseas schemes may be offered at UK centres.

Grading is usually on a pass/fail basis and is based on the performance and achievement of outcomes using a method of assessment specified by C&G. In some schemes, the criteria are known to the learner and in others, criteria are used by teachers/examiners for setting and marking tests or examinations.

APL

C&G has issued guidelines to centres on accrediting achievement in particular schemes through a process of APL. It is also used to provide progression against criteria for the senior awards using CVs, employer and colleague testimonials and portfolios.

Validation

C&G uses the term approval to describe the process of validation. A verifier, as a representative of C&G, visits a centre which is seeking approval in order to establish that it is able to run the scheme to a satisfactory standard. Verifiers consider:

- staffing and resources;
- use of assessment materials and record keeping;
- training requirements;
- industrial/commercial links and employer liaison;
- the role of the verifier in relation to the centre's operation of the scheme.

The approval process is completed after the verifier has reported to C&G, and centres are notified that they are authorised to offer particular C&G schemes.

Verification

Changes in assessment methods and a move away from a system of national C&G examinations have led to a new emphasis on the role of the verifier in ensuring that national standards are maintained. Verifying assessors therefore visit centres and discuss the scheme with learners, staff and institution managers. The emphasis is on scrutinising how assessment is carried out: verifiers meet a group of learners which is representative of the ability range covered by the scheme, and have access to all available, assessable work. Discussions are held with staff about how performance criteria are applied and how assessment is arrived at. Actual assessments may be observed and advice offered to centre staff about assessment processes and the delivery of competence-based programmes.

Verifiers also act as a channel of communication between C&G and the centres for information and market intelligence. Responsibility for the assessment of C&G schemes is becoming decentralised with an enhanced role for the centres. There is therefore a corresponding increase in the emphasis given to the training of centre assessors and this may become part of the verifier's role.

Verifiers produce a report which focuses on resources, staffing, training offered to learners, assessment and record keeping and C&G regulations and information.

C&G is currently reviewing its verifier training and is adopting the standards developed by the Training Development Lead Body.

Moderation

Where the term is used in C&G accreditation, it describes the process of ensuring that existing examination papers or tests are similar to previous ones in terms of standard and complexity.

Monitoring

Monitoring is carried out to ensure that national standards of assessment are maintained. Verifiers sample the available evidence of performance and ensure that the range of ability and variety of assessment tasks are scrutinised. Testing of specific activities may also be carried out. Monitoring is designed to ensure that assessments are properlyadministered, performance criteria are consistently applied, candidates recorded as successful are meeting national standards of competence and suitable procedures exist for candidates to resubmit themselves
for assessment at a later date.

Joint certification

C&G has agreements on joint certification with a number of organisations, including lead bodies. These include the Association of British Travel Agents National Training Board, Construction Industry Training Board, National Retail Training Council. The names of the organisation also appear on the relevant C&G certificate for a scheme jointly developed by C&G and individual organisations.

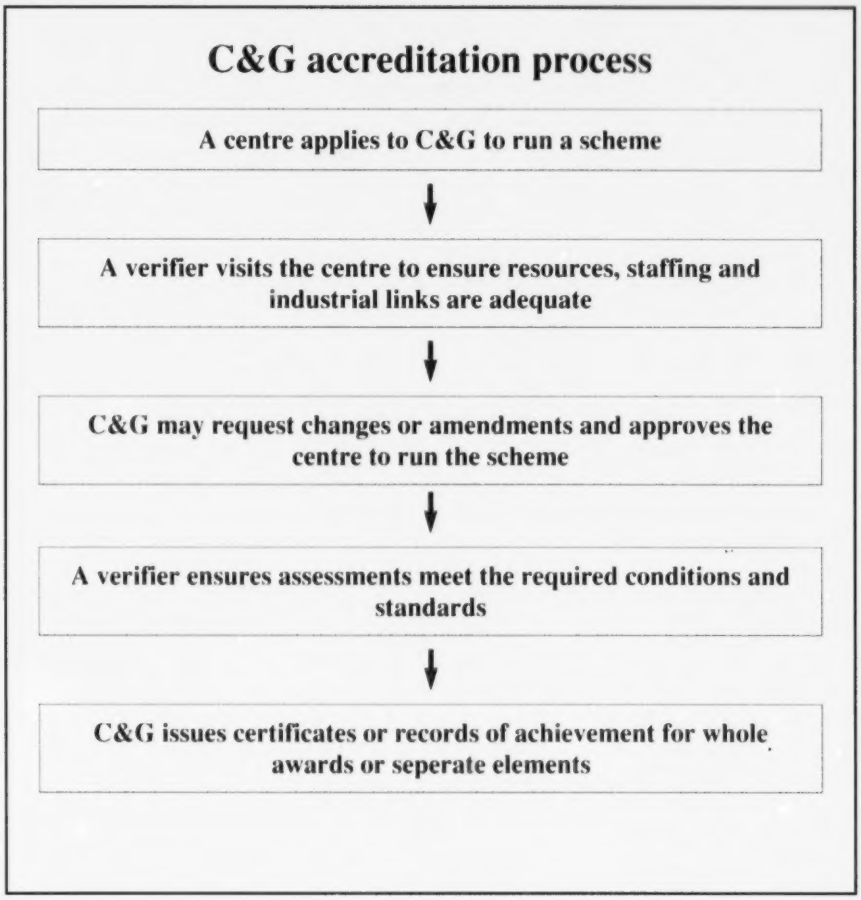
C&G and NVQs

Many C&G qualifications have been accredited as NVQs at Levels 1 - 4. C&G intends to deliver NVQs across all areas as standards become available. C&G is working with NCVQ on the development of GNVQs.

C&G Publications

C&G produce a wide range of general guidelines, syllabus pamphlets, question papers for examinations, skills test booklets, records of in- course achievement, and work-based assessments for all their schemes, as well as learning support material and assignments. Other publications include:

'Qualify for a career in....' (These cover a wide range of occupations)
Profiling
APL handbook
Setting multiple choice tests
Coursework assessment
Setting and moderating written question papers
Constructing practical tests
Records of in-course achievement for a range of occupational roles
Records of work-based assessments


C&G accreditation process
A centre applies to C&G to run a scheme
A verifier visits the centre to ensure resources, staffing and industrial links are adequate
C&G may request changes or amendments and approves the centre to run the scheme
A verifier ensures assessments meet the required conditions and standards
C&G issues certificates or records of achievement for whole awards or seperate elements

RSA Examinations Board

The RSA Examinations Board was formerly part of the Royal Society of Arts and is now an independent awarding body. It is a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity. It provides a large range of qualifications through examination and assessment schemes, including NVQs, at approved centres in the following areas:

- business and administration
- communications and core skills
- community and youth work
- counselling
- finance
- information technology
- languages
- management
- retail, wholesaling and warehousing
- road transport
- secretarial/clerical
- teaching and training

RSA also offers a range of customised programmes to companies, collegesand other organisations. It runs specialised national schemes in areas such as variety entertainment.

Centres using RSA schemes include schools, FE colleges, companies' training centres, adult education institutes, polytechnics, voluntary organisations and prisons. Some centres are overseas.

Schemes

Syllabus content is published for each scheme. This indicates where separate examinations/assessments for elements within a whole qualification may be taken as free-standing awards. RSA does not prescribe patterns or lengths of study and centres may enter any candidate they consider to have a reasonable chance of success. It does, however, outline target customers for each scheme.

The qualifications are divided into two categories;

- external examinations are set, marked and moderated by RSA and offered on or between specific dates;
- verified schemes are vocational qualifications which are locally assessed and verified by RSA verifiers.

RSA will assist centres in the development of specific assessment and certification arrangements in a customised scheme.

Levels

Series examinations are offered at Stages I, II and III which represent increasing levels of complexity in both skills and knowledge. Verified schemes correspond to NVQ levels, although not all of these schemes are accredited as NVQs.

Each level aims to prepare the candidate for the stage above. Vocational qualifications range from Diploma, Advanced, Higher and Teachers.

RSA and NVQs

RSA is accredited by NCVQ to offer a number of NVQs. Other RSA verified schemes which are not accredited as NVQs are being revised into the NCVQ format. They specify competences and criteria to be covered and lead body standards are incorporated into RSA qualifications as appropriate. RSA is working to align its own structure of qualifications with the NVQ levels. RSA is working with NCVQ on the development of GNVQs.

Credit

RSA does not use the term credit to ascribe a value to learning outcomes. Where it is used, it refers to individual elements and units.

Accumulation of Units

Component parts of RSA schemes both in and outside NVQ qualifications can be accredited over a period of time. Candidates who do not achieve a full qualification receive a certificate listing those units/elements which have been achieved. Units and elements can therefore generate the issue of awards and qualifications.

Some units may appear in more than one verified scheme. Once an individual has achieved the unit, it can count towards another qualification.

Assessment

RSA schemes and syllabuses are criterion-referenced and use a range of assessment methods. In verified schemes, assessment of outcomes may cover a range of methods and approaches. Candidates' achievements are recorded in a Cumulative Assessment Record or logbook and signed by the Assessor and Programme or Centre Co-ordinators. The verifier signs the claim for certification during his/her visit to the Centre after s/he is satisfied that internal assessments are valid and reliable.

Examined schemes are also competence-based and may be either written and/or practical demonstrations.

Grading is not used. However, in some examined schemes the award of a 'Pass with Distinction' occurs where candidates have met additional specified criteria.

APA

APA is an acceptable form of assessment within any RSA verified scheme and RSA has offered guidelines to centres regarding APA.

Validation

RSA uses a process of evaluation to approve a centre to run an RSA-verified scheme. The centre completes an application and RSA sends a detailed questionnaire about delivery, resources, assessment and staff roles. RSA uses this as a basis for an evaluation visit carried out by a verifier trained in this role. Centres have to ensure that there will be appropriate internal quality assurance mechanisms, suitable facilities and staff, to carry out different roles: centre coordinator, programme co-ordinator and assessors.

For some of its teacher and trainers qualifications, RSA uses a more detailed process of validation which scrutinises a proposal from the centre which specifies details of delivery, assessment and programme team composition.

Centres applying to offer Examined Schemes undergo an inspection process.

Verification

The verifier's main role is to ensure that assessment conforms to the standards and criteria specified by the qualification. The verifier will check that the quality assurance mechanisms proposed by the centre at the evaluation stage are operating. S/he liaises with programme co-ordinators and assessors and samples the work of a number of candidates. A number of different sampling techniques may be used to ensure that standards are consistent: looking at the work of one assessor across a range of candidates, checking one particular unit for a range of candidates or looking at one particular area which may be causing problems.

Verifiers offer guidance and support to centres about scheme delivery and assessment and produce a written report with action points to be followed up. Verifiers have a responsibility to monitor and comment on the general standard of the work or assessment of the documentation provided.

Chief and regional verifiers co-ordinate a team of local verifiers in order to monitor their own general performance and identify areas of concern. All verifiers are required to attend three days training a year for general updating and subject-specific developments.

Moderation and standardisation

Where external assessment or examinations are offered, RSA uses this term to describe a process which ensures that examination papers and assessment materials offered to candidates are valid and reliable, and meet fully the assessment criteria of the scheme. During and after marking by RSA examiners, a range of standardisation procedures is used to ensure that assessment is consistent and fair.

Local assessors of verified schemes are encouraged to discuss their assessments in moderation discussions with other assessors in the centre.

Certification

Certification for verified schemes identifies units of certification which are the smallest achievement which will be certificated separately and accumulated for progression. These units record achievement of specific competences. Cumulative Assessment Records are used to record achievement of separate elements.

If all the units within a particular qualification are achieved a separate certificate will be issued for the full award and for the list of units within the qualification.

RSA Publications

RSA publishes a range of bulletins, guides, syllabuses, reports, past question papers and assessment materials. Publications include:

Principles and practices
Special needs
A pocket guide to Accreditation of Prior Achievement
Booklets for each scheme
Notes of Guidance — Vocational Qualifications

For certain examined schemes, RSA publishes student/teacher books with Heinemann Educational.

RSA verified schemes accreditation process

A centre applies to RSA to run a scheme and completes an evaluation form

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An RSA evaluator visits the centre to ensure that resources, staff roles, delivery and assessment arrangments are adequate

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RSA may request changes or amendementss and approves the centre to run the scheme

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A verifier ensures assessments meet the required conditions and standards

The Council for National Academic Awards

CNAA is a national awarding body authorised by Royal Charter to validate HE courses leading to degrees, higher degrees, diplomas and certificates in polytechnics and colleges which are not chartered universities. CNAA determines the conditions governing the approval of courses and the conferment of awards paying particular attention to the standards achieved by students and the quality of teaching offered. It is the responsibility of the CNAA to ensure that academic awards conferred are comparable in standard with other awards throughout higher education in the UK, including those conferred by the Universities. CNAA therefore has a quality assurance role in HE. It also validates organisations such as professional bodies to award credits to individuals towards degree level qualifications.

However, the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 abolishes CNAA and transfers its different roles to individual HE institutions or to the Higher Education Quality Council. The council will have a division for credits and access which will incorporate the work of the Access Courses Recognition Group (ACRG) and provide a national focus for CATS.

Accreditation

CNAA uses this term differently to other systems. Accreditation is a technical term used specifically to refer to a process that enables the responsibility for validation, approval and review to be delegated to institutions which have the ethos, capacity, experience and resource to operate procedures for scrutinising and maintaining academic standards. The academic board of the institution therefore has responsibility for all aspects of the programmes offered.

Association

In an institution which is associated with CNAA but not accredited by it (such as a college of higher education or a large company), CNAA retains responsibility for the final approval of courses, but works in close partnership with the institution to enable it to assume as much responsibility as possible for the scrutiny of its own courses.

Validation

CNAA validates courses leading to degrees. It uses a system of validation, approval and review through which experts from industry, commerce, the professions and HE decide whether a course is at an appropriate standard.

A course proposal is scrutinised by the validating panel and may be amended before it is finally approved. Once approved, the course is subject to regular informal monitoring and a formal review every five-to-seven years.

Some companies (such as the computer firm IBM) with high standards of teaching, training and assessment can form a direct relationship with CNAA in order to provide programmes equivalent to those in HE institutions. Commercial training can therefore lead directly to CNAA awards.

Credit accumulation and Transfer Scheme

CATS is based on the principle that 'appropriate learning, wherever it occurs, provided it can be assessed may be recognised for academic credit towards an award' (CNAA). CATS enables individuals to gain academic awards by accumulating credit points for the successful completion of appropriate and assessed learning activities. Individuals can obtain an award in one continuous period of learning or with interruptions. Learning can be achieved through:

- distance learning materials
- employment-basedactivities
- full-time study
- life experiences
- other appropriate activities.
- part-time study
- private study
- professional up-dating
- training courses

CATS makes it possible to award academic credit for in-company and employment based programmes. A wide range of colleges, polytechnics, universities, employers, professional bodies and other organisations are participating in CATS. Many academic institutions have arrangements to enable individuals to acquire academic awards through CATS.

CATS operates in two ways: Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) and credit rating.

APEL

A process of recognising and assessing prior experiential learning enables general credits to be assigned to knowledge, skills and competences which an individual already possesses and can demonstrate. Valid and reliable evidence has to be provided to support claims for APEL.

Validation and accreditation of programmes

Providers of courses including those run by companies for in-service training for their employees, can approach a CNAA-accredited institution or CNAA itself to request validation for that course. The institution will then use its own validation and quality assurance procedures to determine the number and level of credits appropriate for the course and whether validation will be granted.

A submission has to be prepared showing:

- clear statements of objectives or learning outcomes;
- mode and structure of the course;
- details of admissions and staffing;
- teaching, learning and assessment strategies;
- quality procedures;
- equal opportunities.

Members of the CATS institution offering and the course providers consider the submission in detail and validate the course if it meets the requirements for levels and credits.

Credits

These are general and specific. Because there is such a variety of academic programmes, it is not feasible to credit rate a learning activity such as a short training course by quantifying every aim and objective. CNAA therefore assesses the extent to which that activity would satisfy the requirements for a notional programme in a subject area. The credit points assigned in this way are general credits and each individual who satisfactorily completes the course is given these credit points.

General credits can then be transferred by an individual towards an actual programme leading to an academic award. The institution admitting the learner converts the general credits as specific credits in relation to the objectives of an actual award. A general credit rating does not imply its acceptance for specific credit in all circumstances but is an authoritative guide to prospective students and admissions tutors of a learner's past achievement and allows the construction of an appropriate programme of study.

Panels of subject experts are established by CNAA CATS to recognise programmes for general credit points. The CNAA provides guidelines for members of these panels to help them reach judgements about the credit rating of learning programmes, particularly those in employment, professional or other settings. It also provides detailed guidelines for staff assigning credit points to units of programmes leading to undergraduate or postgraduate qualifications.

There are four levels of CAT credit:

1	First-year undergraduate
2	Second-year undergraduate
3	Final-year undergraduate
4	Masters

Credit rating ascribes a numerical value and level — based on the overall standard of the bachelor or masters degree — to academic programmes and their individual units, short courses, training programmes, professional qualifications and other types of learning activity. These credit points can be accumulated towards the total needed for a particular academic award.

The CNAA enables students on some of its programmes to build to a CNAA award (bachelor or masters degree) by accumulating credit points from short courses, longer training provision or relevant life and work experiences. The CNAA validates various higher education establishments to run a CAT scheme. Institutions give credit ratings for programmes already being run or for particular units

Centres can, therefore:

- award credits for their own programmes or parts of them;
- award credits for any relevant experience and achievement;
- award credits in the CAT scheme to programmes run by other educational establishments.

An example of credit rating is given below.

CATS has credit rated the Accounting for Managers course offered by a large company as part of its management (development) programme. It has been assigned 120 general credit points at Level 1 on the basis that the programmes broadly cover the same learning material found in the first year of a typical Accounting degree.

Candidate A has successfully completed the programme and applies to undertake the Accounting Degree at a London polytechnic. While the candidate has 120 general credit points, s/he is awarded only 90 specific credit points within this degree. This is because the degree contains a major element in computer information systems as part of its requirements, which is not part of the Accounting for Managers course. The candidate will need to undertake this unit and so acquire the additional 30 specific credits before proceeding to the next level of the degree.

Candidate B has successfully completed the programme and applies to undertake the Accounting degree at another London polytechnic. In this case, the Accounting for Managers programme matches closely the first year of the degree course. However, it is five years since the candidate completed the programme and the polytechnic grants the candidate 100 specific credit points out of the 120 general credit points. S/he is set an individual assignment worth 20 specific credit points which is designed to update the candidates knowledge, particularly in the area of business law and standard accounting procedures.

Candidate C has successfully completed the programme and applies to undertake a business studies degree at a Midlands polytechnic. In this case, only certain elements of the Accounting for Managers course meet the requirements of the first year of the degree. These are in the areas of accounting, finance, law, economics and decision-making. The candidate is granted 60 specific credits at level 1 out of the 120 general credit points but must complete additional units in behaviour studies, statistics and other aspects of business functions because these form part of the requirements for the degree programme s/he has transferred to.

Candidate D has successfully completed the programme and has also achieved a professional accounting qualification which has been assigned 120 credit points at Level 2. The candidate applies to undertake an individually negotiated degree programme specifically aimed at studying accounting with special application to another EC state. The candidate receives 100 specific credit points at Level 1 because in the context of his/her programme it is decided that there should be a language element at Level 1 which is negotiated through a suitable distance learning package. The candidate also receives only 60 specific credit points at Level 2 since it is decided that he/she should continue with language studies and should also undertake study of business environment in the EC state if the programme is to meet its objectives.

CNAA Publications

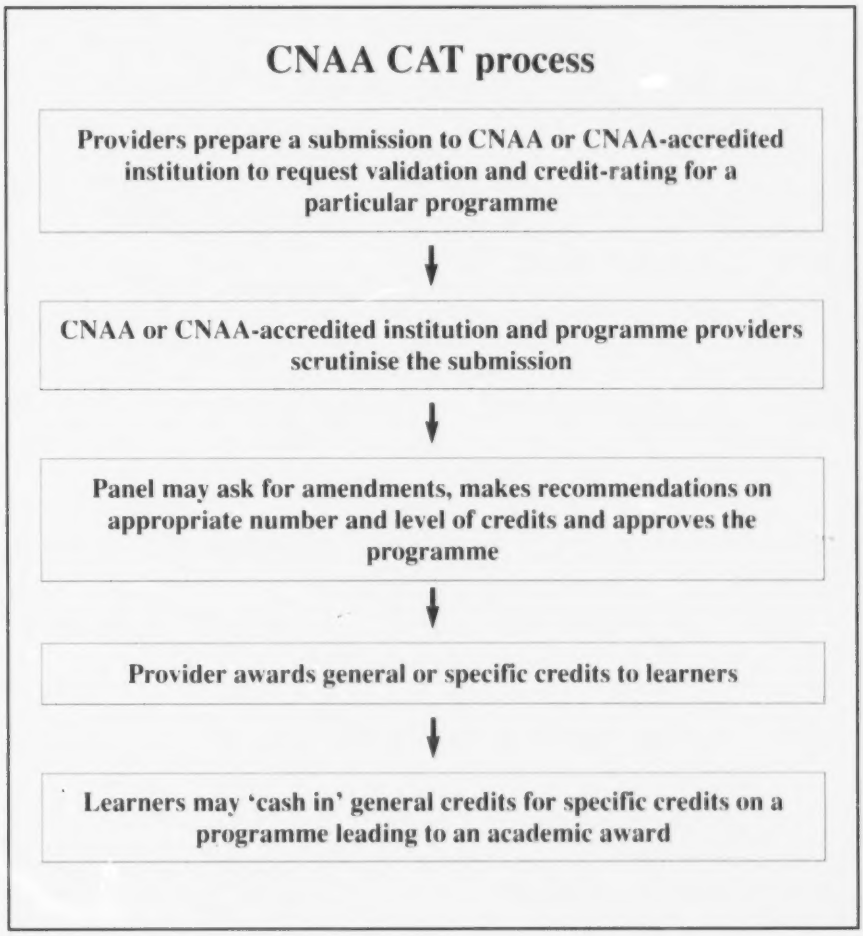
CNAA has carried out a number of research and development projects into subject specific issues or issues of general interest. They have also helped to produce the *Education Credit Transfer Directory* (ECTIS 2000) and the *Student Guide to Education and Credit*. Publications include:

A series relating to Access courses to HE.

The work of the Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme
The assessment of prior experiential learning
How shall we assess them?
Good practice in assessment: criteria and procedures for CNAA undergraduate courses.
The assessment of prior experiential learning.
Going modular.
Vocationalism in CNAA degree courses.
The modular option.
Development of placement and assessment procedures in supervised work experience.
Quality assurances systems: issues for consideration
The measurement of value added in HE.

Flowchart of CATs accreditation

There are currently two routes. A programme may be submitted either to CNAA centrally or to a CNAA accredited institution. With the demise of CNAA, alternative arrangements are being negotiated for central credit-rating, but accredited institutions will also continue to offer CATs accreditation.


CNAA CAT process
Providers prepare a submission to CNAA or CNAA-accredited institution to request validation and credit-rating for a particular programme
CNAA or CNAA-accredited institution and programme providers scrutinise the submission
Panel may ask for amendments, makes recommendations on appropriate number and level of credits and approves the programme
Provider awards general or specific credits to learners
Learners may 'cash in' general credits for specific credits on a programme leading to an academic award

Access Courses Recognition Group

The CNAA and the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals (CVCP) established the ACRG at the request of the DES in 1989. The ACRG is jointly organised by the CNAA and CVCP and jointly funded by the Higher Education Funding Councils. (Under the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 the work of the ACRG will be incorporated into the division for Credits and Access in the new Higher Education Quality Council.)

The ACRG is neither a validating nor an awarding body. Its function is to license locally-based collaborative agencies to validate Access Courses; these agencies are known as Authorised Validating Agencies (AVAs).

The ACRG authorises such agencies to validate Access to HE courses. It does not scrutinise individual Access courses, but satisfies itself as to the suitability of the process of validation used by the AVA. The AVA in turn awards Access certificates to successful learners, signifying the status of the Access Course within the national framework of recognition.

A framework of national arrangements for the recognition of Access Courses is intended to improve their national currency. The purpose of recognition is to:

- enable Access certificates achieved in individual access courses to gain wider acceptability or currency across the HE system as a whole;
- provide a safeguard against 'erosion of standards';
- provide a more generally understood and uniform framework and to maintain rigour without imposing rigidity so that a diversity of Access courses can be provided;
- act as a catalyst for innovation within HE.

Its system of recognition has the following features:

- its remit is focused upon courses or programmes of study which are designed to provide access to HE;
- it authorises other agencies to validate Access courses;
- it does not specify criteria for course content, although it has made recommendations about course length. The ACRG has identified certain key characteristics (such as duration of at least 500 study hours) and has published advice and guidance on features of good practice.

The ACRG is a national agent for data collection and dissemination and compiles a national register of Access courses.

Authorised Validating Agencies

These are consortia, partnerships or federations (including Open College Networks or agencies led by a single HE institution) including both HE and FE institutions, plus community groups and LEAs in some cases.

They vary in size and volume of activity; some are limited to quality assurance processes but most are involved additionally with curricular design, staff development, marketing and planning functions.

The ACRG has awarded validating agency status to all members of the National Open College Network and OCNs validate a majority of Access to HE courses.

Validation

An agency or consortium which wishes to become an AVA applies to the ACRG to be licensed to validate individual Access courses. Through a submission, it demonstrates experience with Access courses and gives details of the processes, mechanisms, criteria and personnel to be involved in the validation of Access courses, monitoring and ongoing review.

The ACRG then approves and licenses the validating agency. The AVA undertakes a formal agreement with the ACRG which:

- assures ACRG that resources are available to implement the scheme;
- agrees to a timetable of periodic reviews by the ACRG, the supply of information to ACRG for the register of recognised Access Courses, and to institute systems for monitoring data on Access students' progress and performance;
- demonstrates how monitoring, moderation and external examination will be carried out;
- undertakes to provide appropriate arrangements for dealing with appeals and complaints.

The agreement forms a basis for an ongoing relationship between the ACRG and the AVA, including consultation and periodic review.

Certification

The conditions of approval for AVAs specify that no grading should appear on the formal certificate awarded to the student. The AVA may provide an accompanying profile or record of achievement.

AVAs award kitemarked certificates on behalf of ACRG and the certificate signifies that the student has successfully completed a planned programme of studies involving at least 500 study hours and has achieved a level of attainment appropriate for admission to HE.

Moderation and external examining

Following initial validation and approval of the Access course or programme, quality assurance processes rely on annual course monitoring and periodic review. Arrangements for moderation and external examining vary between AVAs, but each AVA must specify the range of activities, roles, duties and responsibilities to be carried out by moderators and external examiners and provide information about these arrangements to the ACRG.

ACRG Publications

The ACRG has produced a series of four bulletins *Access Courses to Higher Education — a framework of national arrangements for recognition*. These have guidelines and advice about good practice in running Access to HE programmes. A register of recognised Access courses will be published in September 1992.

ACRG accredition process

Agency applies to the ACRG to be licensed to validate access courses

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ACRG scrutinises agency submission, makes recommendations or asks for amendments. In turn, it authorises the agency as an AVA

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AVA works with member institutions to develop Access Courses, to the point where an organisation formally applies to AVA to offer an Access Programme

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AVA validates programme and agrees arrangements for monitoring, moderation etc.

↓

ACRG undertakes periodic review of AVA

↓

AVA issues certificates to learners kitemarked by ACRG

Section 4

Accreditation Systems: Key Features

The chart overleaf summarises the key features of the major systems. Details are correct at time of publication but all systems are undergoing change. This particularly involves CNAA and ACRG, where the functions will transfer to new bodies under the Further and Higher Education Act 1992.

	LEVELS	CREDITS	VALIDATION RECOGNITION	VERIFICATION MODERATION	COSTS	MODE
CITY & GUILDS (C&G) City & Guilds of London Institute, 46 Britannia Street, London WC1H 0HH	Occupational levels based on skill acquisition, use of technology and autonomy.	C&G does not use a specific definition of 'credit' to ascribe a value to learning. Awards and qualifications are divided into elements which can be achieved separately.	Verifier visits centre to ensure that resources, staff expertise are adequate; C&G then approves the centre to run a C&G scheme.	Verifying assessor visits the centre at least once a year to monitor assessment practices, examine samples of evidence and ensure that assessment conforms to national standards.	Candidate fees for each scheme. Special costs for customised development of modules. Costs to centres.	No prescription of patterns/ lengths of study. Schemes may be offered in a wide variety of ways including: Full time Part time Block Evening programmes APL
RSA Westwood Way, Coventry CV4 8HS	Series examination schemes – Stages I, II and III. Verified schemes relate to NVQ levels.	RSA does not use a specific definition of 'credit' to ascribe a value to learning. Awards and qualifications are divided into elements which can be achieved separately.	Verified Schemes: An evaluator visits centre to ensure that staff expertise, resources and internal arrangements to run the scheme are adequate. RSA then approves the centre to run an RSA scheme. Approved centres are registered to run RSA Examined Schemes.	Verifier visits centre to ensure quality assurance mechanisms are operating. S he uses a range of sampling techniques to ensure that assessment standards conform to national standards. Examined schemes are set and worked by RSA. Some include external assessment which is moderated by RSA.	Costs for initial evaluation and addition of further verified schemes, for learner registration and certification. Fees list for schemes published annually.	No prescription of patterns/ lengths of study. Schemes may be offered in a wide variety of ways including: Full time Part time Block Evening APA External candidates
CNAA Council for National Academic Awards, 334-354 Grays Inn Road, London WC1X 8BP	Certificate of HE. Diploma of HE. Degrees (levels 1-3). Higher Degrees (level M).	Credits are based on 1/360th of a full-time honours degree. Programmes are credit-rated for general or specific credits. General credits can be converted to specific credits towards a qualification depending on content, how recently they were gained etc.	Centres are either accredited to validate, assess and confer their own awards or validation is carried out by CNAA itself. Other centres can apply to CNAA accredited centre for the centre to validate their programmes for CATs.	Accredited centres carry out their own review and evaluation. CNAA reviews other centres every 5-7 years.	Learners are charged for credit rating and APL.	Full time Part time Block Sandwich etc. General credits can be given for other study, APL etc.

AREAS	FLEXIBILITY	CERTIFICATION	CAT	PROGRESSION	ASSESSMENT
Many vocational areas. Technical certificates. General education. Teacher training (FE and AE). Supervisory training. Leisure.	Will assist and offer guidance in developing totally customised modules. Customised verification and assessment. APL guidelines provided for a range of programmes.	Certificates issued by C&G for whole awards. Record of achievement and/or skills test shows accumulation of components. Certificates sometimes issued for single components.	C&G are negotiating with CNAA for credit – rating for their Senior and Professional Awards.	Components of C&G schemes can be accumulated over time towards whole awards or qualifications. Each level builds skills, knowledge and autonomy within occupational areas.	There is emphasis on demonstration of competence. Some examinations and tests are set by C&G. Grading is on Pass/Fail basis and is criterion referenced.
A wide range of occupational and vocational areas including community and youth work, teaching, training, assessing and management.	Separate assessment for particular elements or a group of elements. Customised schemes can be developed in conjunction with RSA. APA Guidelines.	RSA issues certificates for all full awards and for some elements. Cumulative assessment record for vocational qualifications, leads to certification of individual units.	Some elements or units may appear in more than one qualification. Once a learner has achieved the unit, it can be transferred to other awards.	Elements of RSA schemes can be accumulated towards an award or whole qualification. Each level builds skills, knowledge and autonomy within occupational areas.	Emphasis on demonstration of competence. Both vocational awards and examinations are competence based and criterion referenced.
Higher Education courses. Professional education and training.	Other centres can apply to CNAA or to Accredited centres to accredit short training courses for CAT.	Credit record can be issued by accredited centre or CNAA. General credits are recorded if someone leaves a course early. Certificate issued by Accredited centres or by CNAA.	Students register with a CATS centre for a credit-rating of previous study and experience. CNAA can also register students with HE institution or register them centrally. CNAA assists employers, professional organisations and HE institutions to implement their own CATS.	BTEC Higher National Diplomas and professional training can lead to degrees. Progression to postgraduate qualifications.	Assessment is via modes and methods used in HE, including work experience.

	LEVELS	CREDITS	VALIDATION RECOGNITION	VERIFICATION MODERATION	COSTS	MODE
Open College Networks c/o NOCN, London Open College Federation, University of North London, 1 Prince of Wales Road, London NW5 3LB.	1 Basic Skills, concepts, practical activities. 2 Consolidation of existing skills and introduction of new ones. 3 Extension and application of skills. Independent learning. 4 Development and independent application of critical selective skills etc.	Learning outcomes are defined at four levels. Each credit represents the outcomes achievable in 30 hours notional learning time. Can be gained at a variety of levels to suit the learner.	Tutors design their own programmes and submit them to a peer group panel for recognition. The recognition panels review the internal coherence and consistency of the programme and agrees the level s and a credit value for the learning outcomes identified.	External moderator appointed by recognition panel. Visits programme (minimum 1 visit for a 10-week course) to review all aspects of delivery, and convenes the peer group panel which moderates learners' achievement and agrees award of credits.	Free to learners. Charges for providers for: Recognition – on the basis of length of programme; Moderation and Certification – on the basis of numbers of credits and numbers of learners; Differential charges for LEA supported providers and non-LEA supported providers where LEA funds OCN.	Programmes are offered in a variety of ways including: Block Full time Part time Open learning APL Mode is approved on an individual programme basis.
NCVQ National Council for Vocational Qualifications, 222 Euston Road, London NW1 2BZ	1 Routine, predictable work competence. 2 Greater individual responsibility and wider range of work activities. 3 Complex, non-routine and wider range, some supervision. 4 Complex technical specialised and professional activities; personal accountability. 5 Application of wide range of principles; unpredictability, responsibility, personal autonomy.	NVQs do not use a specific definition of 'credit' to ascribe a value to learning. Qualifications are divided into 'units of competence' based on parts of an occupational role.	Centres can apply to offer NVQs via the awarding bodies. Awarding bodies incorporate standards into their qualifications and set criteria for centres wishing to offer NVQ qualifications. NVQs are delivered by awarding bodies providing they meet NCVQ specification of national standards for assessment.	NCVQ specifies criteria for verification arrangements. Awarding body must ensure competence of assessors and appoint external verifiers to observe assessment processes, examine samples of evidence and ensure that records are adequately maintained and updated. Verifier ensures that assessment practices are consistent and conform to national standards across a range of contexts and conditions.	Awarding body costs for units or whole qualifications. Some APL routes are costed to learners and employers by the individual centres, which offer NVQ units or whole qualifications.	Work-based training. Vocational programmes delivered full or part time in colleges. Assessment and Accreditation of Prior learning (APL) for elements and whole units of competence. Assessment on demand sometimes available, depending on services offered by a particular centre.
BTEC Business and Technology Education Council, Central House, Upper Woburn Place, London WC1H 0HH	First Diploma – foundation for work or further study. National Diploma – develops skills in junior management, supervisory and technician roles. Higher National Diploma – develops skills with greater responsibility. Continuing Education – modules for adults wanting to retrain or develop career professional skills.	BTEC does not use a specific definition of credit to ascribe a value to learning. Qualifications are divided into modules based on 60-80 hours notional 'learning support time'.	Validation carried out by a BTEC panel which scrutinises a proposal to run a programme, suggests amendments where necessary and approves the centre's proposal.	Regular visits each year to approved centres carried out by BTEC external moderators review and evaluate all aspects of delivery – emphasis on assessment, learning assignments and the monitoring of national standards in BTEC programmes. For programmes delivering NVQs, BTEC has appointed external verifiers.	A single learner registration fee covers all costs. Fees may be for whole awards or for modules.	Programmes are offering a variety of ways including: Full time Part time Block Sandwich Open/Distance Learning APL

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AREAS	FLEXIBILITY	CERTIFICATION	CAT	PROGRESSION	ASSESSMENT
Learning is provided through community and voluntary organisations. Vocational programmes. ABE and ESOL. Access to HE courses. Study skills. Locally designed programmes. Work-based learning.	Achievement within a programme can be at all levels. Learners can opt into the credit framework at any stage when they are ready. If learners leave a programme early they can get credits for what they have achieved.	Learners are awarded credits which are recorded in a Credit Record which includes brief details of programmes and details of number and level/s of credits awarded.	All OCNs which are Members of the National Open College Network (NOCN) mutually recognise each others' credits. A quality assurance network between the members of NOCN ensures the consistent application of levels and credits to enable credit transfer to take place.	The levels make progression routes visible to learners. Credits can be accumulated to reach particular targets and equivalents to other qualifications of gain access to further or higher education.	Assessment is criterion-referenced and must be consistent with the level/s of the programme. Points of assessment are clearly identified throughout programmes to enable learners to be accredited for their achievement at the appropriate level if they do not complete a programme.
NVQs for all major occupations to level 4 to be in place by the end of 1992. Some professional bodies are developing standards at level 5.	There are no barriers to access if person meets standards specified in the various awards. Programmes must conform to national standards laid down by an industry lead body for each occupational area.	Certificates are issued by awarding bodies for demonstration of all elements in a unit. A National Record of Achievement shows units certificated and individual elements of competence gained – this is designed for recording achievement throughout a person's life.	Some NVQ units may appear in more than one qualification. Once an individual has achieved the unit, it can be transferred to other NVQ awards.	NVQ units can be gained separately and accumulated towards a whole qualification. Qualifications similar in competence can be grouped together so that generic units of competence can be transferred from one qualification to the other.	Assessment is based on performance criteria and contexts laid down in the national standards. Demonstration and evidence of current competence is required.
All major vocational areas. Professional/Management Education at NVQ levels 4-5. Assessors and verifiers awards. Continuing Education.	Customised modules and short courses can be submitted and approved by BTEC. Combinations of modules from a bank of 'off-shelf' modules can be offered. APL guidelines available. Franchising arrangements for joint delivery.	Full certificates are issued for whole awards. Certificates of Achievement can be issued for module combinations or single modules. Pass/merit/distinction is shown for overall performance at First, National and Higher National levels.	BTEC/CNAA have CAT agreement to link HNDs and management qualifications to credit rating to degree or masters degree level. General credit points are given for HNDs which can be ofered as specific points for a degree.	BTEC levels are sequential and awards build on the skills developed at lower levels. Progression to HE from National level. Progression to Honours Degree is possible from HND.	BTEC requires appropriate and flexible assessment, linked to clear criteria for achievement. Grading – distinction/merit/pass in first and national levels. Pass/not pass for Continuing Education awards.

Section 5

Choosing the Right Accreditation System

The following questions are intended to provide a checklist for agencies which intend to offer new accreditation or wish to review existing forms of accreditation. They may be a useful basis for discussing accreditation with the awarding bodies and for planning accreditation within an organisation or between a number of agencies.

Reasons for offering accreditation

- Why are you seeking accreditation?
  - to provide a link between informal/community based programmes and vocational or academic provision in more formal settings?
  - to recognise work-based training?
  - to provide formal progression to something else e.g. a specific higher level programme, employment or a professional qualification?
  - to increase numbers of qualified learners in line with the organisation's mission or government policy?
  - to increase learners' confidence and to enable them to feel their learning is valued?

Currency of the accreditation

- Will the learner value the award?
- Will it be recognised by local or national employers if it needs to be?
- Will it be recognised by other relevant educational providers, e.g. FE/HE?
- How widespread is the currency of the award — local/regional/national?
- Is it likely to have a currency value for learners in the long term?

Flexibility

- Is accreditation available for short/part-time/open learning programmes?
- Does accreditation permit ongoing development of the programme?
- Is it possible to negotiate student-led outcomes within the accreditation framework?
- Is there flexibility in delivery e.g. APL/drop-in workshop/distance learning?
- How far is it possible to offer accreditation for those learners who want it and not for others in the same group?
- Can learners work at different paces and can there be assessment for accreditation when required by individual learners?
- Can delivery enable a variety of forms of accreditation to be offered to learners to meet different needs?

Responsiveness

- Is the award appropriate to the needs of people from local communities?
- Does the award reflect breadth, diversity and variety in the adult learning curriculum?
- Is the award a suitable vehicle for the development of new provision in the area or centre?
- Do other centres offer similar or duplicate accreditation?

Staff development

- Will staff need to take part in curriculum development work for the award?
- How far does the accreditation process/framework of the award contribute to ongoing staff development for teachers in the programme?
- How far does existing provision have to be changed to meet the requirements of the accreditation in terms of:
  - delivery;
  - assessment method;
  - enrolment and registration?

Levels

- Are the criteria appropriate for your needs informing the levels within the awarding body's accreditation system?
  - — levels of supervision needed?
  - — the degree of learner autonomy/independence?
  - — application of knowledge or study skills?
  - — dependence on prerequisite knowledge or skills?

Certification

- What is the process of awarding points, grades and credits?
- How are they recorded?
- What does the learner actually receive in the form of certificates, records of achievement, etc. from the awarding body and the centre itself?
- How transferable is the format and content of certification to other accreditation systems?

Validation

- What is the process required for gaining approval/recognition/validation to run a whole award or parts of one?
- What is required in the submission?
  - — details of staffing?
  - — facilities?
  - — demonstration of learning outcomes to be covered?
  - — details of assessment strategies to be used?
  - — examples of learning materials?
- Which staff are involved in the process of gaining validation or recognition?
  - — from the centre?
  - — from the awarding body?
- How long does the validation/recognition process take from the original submission?
- How long does the validation last?
- How are renewal or amendments carried out?

Moderation/verification

- What arrangements are made by the awarding body for review/evaluation/monitoring/quality assurance?
  - — Who is involved from the centre?
  - — How are moderators/verifiers appointed and what is their role?
  - — What is expected from the centre?
  - — What extra help and advice can verifiers/moderators provide?
- What additional administrative workload is required to deliver the award?
- What additional work is required from the teaching staff?

Costs

- What charges are made for?
  - — registration for a centre to run a whole award/parts of one?
  - — individual student fees?
  - — costs for developing customised programmes/modules?
- How flexible can registration/assessment payments be?
- What are the actual fees required from:
  - — the learner?
  - — the organisation ?
- Does it cost more to achieve a qualification in separate units?

Areas covered by accreditation

- Which vocational/occupational/academic areas are covered?
- What other awarding bodies also cover the area?
- What is the difference between the awards in the same area?
- Where does the award lead in terms of progression?

Assessment

- What methods of assessment are required by the awarding body?

- How much scope is there for a variety of methods?
- Does the awarding body allow APL to be offered as a route for accreditation?
- How clearly are the learning outcomes specified? How do learners and other staff know what these are?
- Is the assessment norm-referenced? If so, why? If grading is carried out, does it lead inadvertently to norm-referencing?
- Is the assessment criterion-referenced?
- Are the criteria available and comprehensible to the learners so that they know what they are being assessed on and how they are being graded?
- Is the assessment appropriate and supportive to the learners? Does it encourage learners to be able to articulate and recognise what they are learning?
- How closely is assessment related to the intended or declared outcomes of the programme?

Credit accumulation and transfer

- Are there arrangements with other bodies to recognise and use credits from different awards in local or national agreements?
- Are there technical procedures that must be followed and what are they?

Progression

- Are progression routes known and available for those who wish to go further after acquiring the qualification or credits?

Section 6

Issues and Implications

The development of unit and modular learning programmes and credit-based systems of accreditation raises a number of issues about the design and nature of qualifications and the different systems that permit transfer of credit.

Coherence

Making access to assessment and accreditation easier raises questions about coherence in learning programmes designed for individual learners. However, there are many views about what constitutes coherence. Learners may assemble combinations of modules, or parts of programmes, which make sense to them but which may not be viewed as coherent by teachers and providers.

Concerns about the coherence of learning programmes and a desire to ensure the transferability of certain generic skills are behind the debate about core skills (such as communication, I.T., languages, team work), their place within different qualifications and the way in which they are assessed. Core skills are seen as a means of creating links between academic and vocational qualifications and the sectors that provide them - schools, adult education, FE, HE and employment. Core skills proposed by the Schools Examination and Assessment Council (SEAC), NCVQ, the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), BTEC and the DFE demonstrate which skills are seen to be important.

A range of approaches to defining and assessing core skills exist. Some awarding bodies such as BTEC have addressed core skills through the inclusion of essential modules which cover specified common skills such as communication, working and relating with others, applying numeracy, applying information technology, applying design, etc. The modules specify the core skills to be covered and assessed within their programmes.

In NVQs, core skills are subsumed within the occupational standards specified by the lead bodies; they are therefore taken into account in the performance criteria, range statements and underpinning knowledge, but are not separately assessed. Records of achievement to record and evaluate core skills are sometimes used on Access to HE programmes and in A levels. This process is seen by both learners and teachers as a way of making connections between disparate subjects or modules. Some colleges use OCNs to accredit core skills achievement.

Core skills in degree programmes have been addressed through the Enterprise in Higher Education initiative which has sought to describe and develop a wide range of non-specific skills and competences. UDACE has led work in HE to

analyse learning outcomes as a basis for comparison of the outcomes within and between disciplines and to examine questions of difficulty, academic level and progression to further study. UDACE has also examined the criteria sought at entry to HE to produce a profile of personal competences with assessment guidelines for admissions tutors. The clarification of core skills in HE could help to link academic and vocational qualifications at entry to HE, graduation and professional levels much more effectively.

GNVQs are designed to provide a bridge between academic and vocational qualifications at NVQ Levels 2-4. Core skills are specified at each level and it is intended that these will be graded.

Further clarification and discussion is required on how core skills are specified, assessed, recorded and accredited, how they relate to the needs and experience of adult learners, and how core skills enhance coherence for learners. FEU has published a bulletin about core skills and is currently involved in development work relating to these issues.

A National Credit Accumulation and Transfer Framework

The development of accreditation systems and the different definitions of credit have tended to reinforce a distinction between academic and vocational qualifications. Each awarding body has different traditions and perceptions of its role in relation to its clients. In spite of these differences, there is considerable potential for developing much better links between the systems and particularly for transferring credits from one system to another.

There is, therefore, a need for a framework which makes it easier for those who have traditionally not participated in formal learning to gain recognition for their achievement and to move between informal and formal learning opportunities.

Four distinct systems for progression currently operate at national level:

- CNAA CATS in HE;
- NVQs in vocational education and training;
- OCNs in the range of post-compulsory settings;
- GCSE, A and AS levels in schools and FE.

The different systems sometimes recognise equivalences between qualifications and allow entry at appropriate points on the basis of accumulated credit rather than detailed assessment, carried out for each individual learner. However, whilst each system has opportunities for credit accumulation, the possibilities of credit transfer are still limited.

Some organisations and consortia have also developed their own CATS:

- Wirral Metropolitan College aims to credit-rate all its programmes, to record achievement of personal and core skills achievement and to identify generic, transferable modules which can be used on different programmes;

- The London Borough of Islington has devised a post-16 curricular framework in conjunction with employers, schools, FE colleges and HE institutions in order to credit-rate modules alongside traditional qualifications.

- UDACE carried out a study with NCVQ to look at the possibility of units in OCN programmes being transferred towards NVQs. It also examined how some existing qualifications can be related to the OCN levels and credits.

In principle, CAT is an effective and rapid way of ensuring access and progression in formal education and training for those adults whose previous achievement has been recognised within a formal credit system. However, there are a number of problems:

- there are no clear connections between the various accreditation systems; and, as yet, no CAT framework within which the different systems could operate;

- there is a vast area of informal adult and community education and work-based training outside formal accreditation structures.

The problems are being addressed in two distinct ways:

- pragmatic — based on agreements to treat particular qualifications as broadly equivalent, regardless of differences of content;

- technical — based on much more fundamental technical work to identify exactly what each qualification represents, and to agree equivalences on that basis. This is the principle which underlies the work of NCVQ and it makes the control of quality and transferability across systems easier. However, it is much more expensive and time-consuming.

The pragmatic solutions work adequately within each separate accreditation system, but problems arise when learners want to transfer between the systems. HE staff, for example, broadly agree about what they mean by first degree level, although they often have considerable difficulty describing it. On the other hand, staff working in a polytechnic or in OCNs both use the terms level and credit but mean quite different things by terms like basic on which the interpretation of level rests. Other accreditation systems are not based on clear, compatible definitions of credit or level.

The second problem, of the vast range of education and training outside any formal accreditation framework, has been addressed through OCN. They provide a means of bringing diverse settings for learning into a national credit framework, but currently provide a patchy national coverage, despite rapid expansion in the last three years. Members of the NOCN operate an agreed accreditation framework which enables transfer and mutual recognition of credit nationally.

The NCVQ have been directed by the government to accredit all vocational qualifications as NVQs at Levels 1-4 by the end of 1992. This is intended to cover 80% of the workplace. The growth in customised accreditation for companies, professional bodies and other community groups and the absence of occupational standards, particularly higher levels of the NVQ framework means that a vast range of accreditation remains outside this framework.

Awarding bodies have different approaches to quality assurance mechanisms and the use of performance indicators for their procedures and programmes. As a result, there is considerable variation in the emphasis placed by each awarding body on the scope of review and evaluation, guidance, support and dissemination of good practice between centres. These differences add to the problem of gaining agreement about equivalence and progression across the boundaries of accreditation.

A national framework which embraces vocational and academic programmes provided by a wide range of agencies, at all levels of attainment would enable adult learners to enter and re-enter the system at times and places appropriate to their individual needs and intentions.

However, there are a number of prerequisites for establishing such a framework. Agreement on terminology and particularly on a definition of credit is essential before the technical work of ascribing levels and equivalences to different programmes can be carried out. Without clearly defined outcomes and assistance given to programme providers for defining outcomes and increasing the range of assessment approaches, a framework for credit-rating programmes could become mechanistic and bureaucratic. The Further Education Unit (FEU) has produced a discussion bulletin *A Basis for Credit* and is currently involved in development work which is addressing some of these issues. The Government has also commissioned a task group to look at a credit framework for HE.

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Awarding bodies

There follow the full names and addresses of the awarding bodies involved in the accreditation systems described in Chapter 3 (see p.22).

Access Courses Recognition Group
ACRG is now part of the HEQC (see below)

Business and Technology Education Council
Central House, Upper Woburn Place, London WC1H 0HH
Telephone: 071 413 8400

City and Guilds of London Institute
76 Portland Place, London W1N 4AA
Telephone: 071 278 2468

Council for National Academic Awards
CNAA is due to be dissolved in March 1993 and most of its work finished in August 1992. Some of its functions, however, have been transferred to the Higher Education Quality Council and some to the Open University Validation Services. Both of these bodies are based at CNAA's old address:
344 - 354 Grays Inn Road, London WC1X 8BP
Telephone: 071 278 4411

National Council for Vocational Qualifications
222 Euston Road, London NW1 2BZ
Telephone: 071 387 9898

National Open College Networks
Chair: Teresa Bergin, Director, MerOCF,
Rodney House, 70 Mount Pleasant, Liverpool L3 5UX
Telephone: 051 709 9099

Pitman Examinations Institute
Catteshall Manor, Godalming, Surrey GU7 1UU
Telephone: 0486 85311

RSA Examinations Board
Westwood Way, Coventry CV4 8HS
Telephone: 0203 470033

What was UDACE?

The Unit for the Development of Adult Continuing Education was a national development unit for the education of adults in England and Wales. It was created as a unit of the National Institute for Adult Continuing Education in 1984 by the Secretary of State for Education and Science. The Unit's role was to examine possible areas of development, recommend strategies for development and sponsor projects to support development.

In April 1992, following a decision of the Secretary of State, the Unit was merged into the Further Education Unit, which inherits its work and agendas.

What is FEU?

The Further Education Unit is an advisory, intelligence and development body for further education. Its general purpose is to promote quality in the further education sector by encouraging the development of more effective, relevant and flexible learning opportunities for individual learners. FEU undertakes a wide range of activities through its central and regional officers, and works closely with other national training and education agencies.

FEU funds and manages research and development projects that draw on the experience of the FE system, as well as contributing to the national debate on post-16 (initial and continuing) education by its membership of national and regional steering groups, advisory committees and working parties.

Guidance advice and information are offered to the field through published reports and bulletins, and a regular newsletter. FEU is funded by the Department for Education, but accepts commissions from other relevant organisations.

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